ASPECTS OF
HINDU MORALITY

SARAL JHINGRAN

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TO MY HUSBAND
with love and gratitude

FOREWORD

The study of Hindu ethics is a recent phenomenon even though the literary sources are as vast as they are ancient The approach adopted by most Indian writers in this field has been normative and apologetic, chiefly because of the bad press given the subject by early Western exponents, such as John McKenzie (1922) who concluded that "Hindu philosophy furnishes no satisfactory basis for an ethic," and Albert Schweitzer (1936) who dubbed the Hindu ethical system as "world and life negating" Regrettably, echoes of these voices are heard today through the international news media and also through formal studies, as India's population explosion, terroristic communalism and inveterate casteism are high on a long list of social evils which westerners attribute to a culture whose values are deemed fundamentally ascetical, illogical and anti-social The defensive posture of Indian writers on ethics is therefore understandable, especially because of the widespread correlation in the Western world between economic underdevelopment and moral impoverishment

Saral Jhingran, author of *Aspects of Hindu Morality*, breaks ranks with her colleagues and advances the study of Hindu ethics beyond the apologetic stage She writes with the authority of one who knows the tradition from the inside, both in terms of its strengths and weaknesses, and for the most part succeeds in maintaining the objectivity of an impartial researcher

The sources of her research are expanded beyond the classic philosophic texts to include materials dealing with such unconventional subjects as ritualism and polytheism The inclusion of these data sets Hindu ethics in a lived context, and underscores the rich cumulative tradition which still lies waiting to be explored

A major procedural problem in the discipline has been that of defining Hindu ethics Jhingran adopts an ecological motif, demonstrating an organic relationship between ethics, on the one hand, and religion, philosophy and social culture, on the other The relationship is both one of autonomy and dependence The

final picture that emerges of Hindu ethics is that of a discipline which is intellectually systematic, socially comprehensive, and yet always struggling with internal contradictions which are tackled in ingenious ways

Saral Jhingran has earned the appreciation of her fellow ethicists for breaking ground in several places, and in a style and spirit that is as critical as it is sympathetic And so, from these Hawaiian islands where East meets West, it is my hope that this book receives its due of warm aloha both in India and the West

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Cromwell Crawford

PREFACE

The present work aims at a critical evaluation of Hindu ethics in all its diversity, richness and profundity It also seeks to understand Hindu ethics in the wider framework of entire Hindu 'religio-culture' Very early in the course of this study I was forced to acknowledge certain basic truths about Hindu thought, both philosophical and ethical, which have not always been properly appreciated They are (i) The holistic nature of Hinduism in which ethical norms and values are integrally related to and naturally influenced by both Hindu religion and philosophy, (ii) The diversity and complexity of Hindu 'religio-culture' (including Hindu religion, philosophy and morality), so that any understanding of either Hindu religio-philosophy or morality in simplistic terms results in a grave injustice to the subject matter, and (iii) The limitations of the usual historical method of study in the context of Hindu 'religio-culture', as it fails to appreciate both the immense complexity of and the continuity in the religio-moral thought and values of Hinduism This work, in a way, is based on the above three contentions which it also seeks to prove through arguments and exhaustive documentation

Hinduism is an integrated whole in which religion, philosophy, morality and social culture are so intimately related, that neither morality, nor any other aspect of Hinduism, can be studied in isolation without reference to its other aspects The words Hindu Dharma and Hindu 'religio-culture' are used in the present work to express this holistic concept of Hinduism Starting with the assumption that Hindu morality is always directly or indirectly influenced by Hindu religio-philosophical thought, I have sought to understand and examine those beliefs and goals of Hindu religion and philosophy which seem to be presupposed by various concepts, norms and values of Hindu morality

It is my further contention, and the entire work is based on it, that the Hindu Dharma (comprising Hindu religion, philosophy

and morality) is a very rich, highly complex and composite whole which cannot be understood in a mono-polar terminology Often a Western scholar picks up any one aspect of Hindu 'religio-culture', thoughtlessly equates it with the whole of Hinduism and then criticizes it on this faulty premise! Hinduism is so multi-faceted that different writers have been able to propound extremely divergent, highly superficial and one-sided views about it by the simple device of selectively quoting some passages from the Hindu texts and neglecting other equally relevant passages Thus, there have been several misleading evaluations of Hinduism which understand it as world-and-life-negating, soul-centric and/or degenerate and amoral

Such caricatures of Hinduism are due to the failure of these writers to comprehend the basic fact that Hinduism is not a unified creed like the Semitic religions, but is rather a complex and composite whole, comprising several religio-philosophical beliefs, values and practices which are often mutually incompatible Thus, if some of the saints and philosophers of Hinduism advocate world-and-life-negation, there are others who affirm both the reality and worth of a life in the world If Hinduism contains certain self-centric values and tendencies, it also emphasizes man's socio-moral obligations On the negative side, if Hinduism affirms one universal Self in all beings, it also believes in the innate inequality of all men If it expounds highly philosophical ideas, it also encourages crude polytheistic and ritualistic practices It seems that there is a positive counterpart for every negative idea, value or tendency of Hinduism, and vice versa Various beliefs, ideas and values of Hinduism are at once mutually contradictory and complementary We are, therefore, led to the conclusion that Hindu religio-philosophy and morality can be understood in the right perspective only when the multi-dimensional nature and immense diversity of the Hindu 'religio-culture' are frankly recognized

The present work seeks to take cognizance of and understand this diversity of Hindu Dharma by a working device of segregating it into several parallel religio-philosophical traditions Such an analytical division of Hinduism helps to bring into focus various divergent religio-philosophical ideas and socio-moral values that constitute the composite Hindu 'religio-culture' This is

not meant to supplant the historical approach, rather it aims at supplementing it Nor does giving cognizance to the diversity of Hinduism imply an undermining of the fact that Hinduism possesses a basic vision and a certain ethos which underlie all its immense diversity and changing phases The underlying unity and diversity of Hinduism, as well as its immense adaptability, must be appreciated and understood in the context of their interrelationships, as reflected in the dynamics of Hindu 'religio-culture', for any serious attempt at understanding and evaluating Hindu morality Such an understanding of Hindu Dharma paves the way for a reconstruction of the Hindu philosophy of morals which can meaningfully synthesize various ideas and values of Hinduism, and also accommodate modern moral perceptions and values

No understanding of Hindu 'religio-culture' (including its morality) would be complete without reference to what is arguably the most glorious period of Hindu history, namely, that of Hindu renaissance during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century A detailed study of this period is not included in the present work for two reasons First, since my primary concern has been to relate the values and norms of Hindu morality to various religio-philosophical beliefs of Hinduism, I have relied exclusively on classical religio-philosophical texts, and was forced to leave out modern period of Hindu history Secondly, there already exists a vast literature on the saints, thinkers and reformers of this period which is very comprehensive in nature, so that whatever I could have written on the subject would have been merely repetitive

This may provoke an adverse comment, that since there is an equally vast literature on Hindu ethics, there was no need for another work on the same subject either But except for a few comprehensive works like those of Surama Das Gupta and Cromwell Crawford, the majority of works on Hindu ethics are quite superficial in their understanding and treatment of the subject matter A large portion of the existing literature on Hindu ethics comes from Western writers, whose critical comments only betray their ignorance and want of sympathetic understanding of the Hindu ethos Indian authors have also generally failed to do justice to the immense richness and complexity of the

Hindu 'religio-culture' and morality While most Indian thinkers have adopted an apologetic stance and tried to rationalize the various shortcomings and contradictions of Hindu thought and practice, some others have uncritically rejected Hindu philosophy and spirituo-moral values And to the best of my knowledge, no one has seriously tried to relate Hindu moral values and norms to its religio-philosophical beliefs and goals, as I have attempted in this work

In a departure from the usual practice, I have considerably enlarged the field of reference for the present study to include, in addition to the usual texts, the *Mahābhārata* and the Purānas These works contain important discussions on moral issues and reflect the mores and values of the then Hindu society Hence, they deserve more attention than is usually given to them

The plan of this work was developed after long discussions with Prof N K Devaraja whose guidance has been with me throughout the long period in which this work has been completed He has also kindly read the final draft and given me his constructive suggestions I am extremely grateful to him for his kind guidance I am also profoundly grateful to Prof Cromwell Crawford who has gone through two drafts of the work at various stages of its development and has given me extremely valuable suggestions for its improvement Prof Crawford has very kindly written the foreword to this work for which also I am very grateful to him Prof K J Shah has read my manuscript and given me his valuable critical suggestions, and I take this opportunity to thank him I have also benefited by a long discussion with Prof R C Gandhi who made me see certain shortcomings of my approach, especially concerning my treatment of the tradition of liberation, and I am naturally very grateful to him My sincere thanks are due to Prof G C Pande for his guidance and encouragement He has read the final draft of the work and given his 'opinion' on it for which I am grateful to him I am also thankful to Prof K K Mittal whose kind guidance and constructive suggestions have helped me immensely, especially at the initial stages of this work My son Dhir has helped in the final editing of the work, especially its language, and I appreciate his help and interest

New Delhi —*Saral Jhingran*
November 1987

ABBREVIATIONS

Āpast D S	Āpastamba Dharmasūtra
B G	Bhagavadgītā
Bhāg P	Bhāgavata Purāna
Br S	Brahma Sūtra
Bṛhad Up	Brhadaranyaka Upanısad
Chān Up	Chāndogya Upanısad
Gaut D S	Gautama Dharmasūtra
Hıstory	P V Kane, Hıstory of Dharmaśastra
M S	Manusmrtı
Mbh	Mahābhārata
Mbh Anus P	Mahabhārata, Anusasana Parva
Mbh Āran P	Mahabhārata, Āranyaka Parva
Mbh Śan P	Mahabhārata, Śantı Parva
Ś B	Śamkara Bhasya
Up	Upanısad
Yajñ S	Yajñavalkya Smrtı

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

HINDUISM THROUGH THE AGES

I Intimate Relation between Religion, Philosophy and Ethics in Hinduism

As observed in the preface, the present work seeks to understand and evaluate Hindu morality in a new perspective It takes the integrated nature of Hindu 'religio-culture' as its point of departure, and argues that Hinduism is a complex whole in which religion, philosophy and morality are so inextricably bound together that a proper understanding of both Hindu religion and philosophy becomes a pre-requisite for any worthwhile attempt at understanding and evaluating Hindu morality This may provoke a very basic question Why should the study of Hinduism be a pre-requisite for a study of Hindu morality? This question implies the claim of ethics as an independent branch of learning which refuses to be subordinated to religion It also raises, an even more basic issue of the relation, if any, between religion and ethics True, ethical behaviour and ethics as a science do not necessarily presuppose a religio-philosophical creed However, not only does every activity presuppose some knowledge of pragmatic matters, it also involves ideas or beliefs regarding the nature of the objective world and the subject In moral behaviour man has to be conscious of himself as a moral agent, and this presupposes some definite concept of the human self, as also of the goal(s) or value(s) which man seeks to realize through his conduct Human conduct, being a pursuit of moral values, also implies a faith in those values and a hope of their realization and conservation in the existing world order Kant is right when he contends that our moral consciousness implies certain unprovable ontological beliefs regarding the world, the immortality of the soul and the Divine Providence This does not mean that ethics is necessarily dependent upon religion for support, but man's

metaphysical beliefs do seem to condition his entire approach to life and conduct In the words of S Radhakrishnan

"Any ethical theory must be grounded in metaphysics, in a philosophic concept of the relation between the conduct and the ultimate reality As we think the ultimate reality to be, so we behave, vision and action go together "[1]

The two, religio-philosophy and conduct, are inextricably linked together in Hinduism Together they form both a view of life and a way of life As explained by S C Chatterjee

"In fact, the Hindu code of life never stands divided from Hindu philosophy Rather, it is a code for a religious mode of life which is organically related to a theory of reality In truth, Hinduism as a religion is both a view of life and a way of life which are related as the theoretical and practical sides of the same spiritual life "[2]

At the same time, the term religion has to be given a broader meaning in the context of Hinduism In modern Western thought the term religion has come to mean a determinate theistic world view which generally understands ethical values and norms in terms of God's commands Hinduism, however, is a curious phenomenon in which ethical problems are rarely discussed independently of religious ones, and yet in which the central ethical term *dharma* is completely independent of any reference to the Creator God The Lord in Hinduism is the embodiment of all ethical qualities known to man, and yet man's ethical norms are in no way derived from His being or His commands, as in the Semitic religions The term *dharma*, which is now loosely used as a synonym for religion, is much more profound and comprehensive than the latter In its original usage *dharma* mainly meant duty or righteousness, both in the moral and the ritualistic contexts It is this meaning of *dharma* with which we are most concerned in the present work and we shall have occasion to study it in the last section But *dharma*, specially when it is prefixed by some such proper noun as *Sanātana* (Vedic) or Bauddha, means the whole of religion, philosophy and moral code of a given people or community By Hindu Dharma we mean that integral way of life advocated in Hinduism which comprehends all the three, namely, religion, metaphysics and moral code

Anyone wanting to study the morality of Hindus is confronted by the fact that in the Hindu 'religio-culture' there are no such compartmentalized fields of thought and practice, as religion, philosophy and morality A person who seeks to study anyone aspect of this complex and rich 'religio-culture' will have to study all the related aspects, or else run the risk of distorting his own perception and understanding of the subject matter It is to be remembered here that the marked distinction between the above three fields of knowledge is a product of modern Western thought The thinkers of Renaissance were eager to free the mind and life of man from their centuries old bondage to the Church, and hence asserted the total independence of philosophy, morality and secular sciences from religion which was given a very limited deistic interpretation by them The Western division between religious and secular concerns may be traced further back to the advice of Christ to render unto Ceaser the things that are Ceaser's and to God the things that are God's [3] But no such division is possible in Hinduism wherein God, as we shall see, is the all-comprehending Absolute Hinduism affirms a holistic view of life in which there are no marked distinctions between different aspects of life and thought Thus, ethics has never been a separate subject in Hindu thought At the same time, every Hindu treatise, whether concerned with religion, rituals, philosophy, polity or narration of stories, discusses moral questions and seeks to provide moral norms Any study of Hindu ethics ought to take into account innumerable discussions on ethical matters, scattered throughout ancient Indian literature Also, these diverse ethical viewpoints cannot be properly appreciated without a prior understanding of the different religio-metaphysical stands of various texts Hence, the necessity of understanding all the facets of Hindu Dharma for a proper understanding of Hindu morality Assuming that a study of Hindu Dharma is a pre-requisite to a proper understanding of Hindu morality, the next logical question would be What exactly is meant by Hindu Dharma?

II Hindu Dharma A Multi-dimensional 'Religio-culture'

(1) The term Hindu is very wide and nebulous The inhabitants of this vast sub-continent did not use any labels

to describe their 'religio-culture' The name Hindu was given to them by the Arab invaders very late in their history As is well known, it does not refer to the religion or philosophy of the people, but only to their habitat, the Sindhu valley It is our contention that Hinduism is a very complex 'religio-culture' and must not be understood on the basis of analogy with other world religions with definite, uniform creeds and codes of conduct Any such attempt to understand Hinduism in mono-polar terms tends to misrepresent it It is very difficult to do justice to the very complex phenomenon of Hindu 'religio-culture' through any one-sided definition M Monier Williams is right when he says

"It may with truth be asserted that no description of Hinduism can be exhaustive which does not touch on almost every religious and philosophical idea that the world has ever known

"Starting from the Vedas Hinduism has ended in embracing something from all religions and in presenting phases suited to all minds It is all-tolerant, all-compliant, all-comprehensive, all-absorbing It has its spiritual and its natural aspect, its esoteric and exoteric, its subjective and its objective, its rational and irrational, its pure and its impure It may be compared to a huge polygon, an irregular multilateral figure It has one side for the practical, another for the severely moral, another for the devotional and imaginative, another for the sensuous and sensual, another for the philosophical and speculative And this capacity for almost endless expansion causes almost endless sectarian divisions "[4]

Hinduism has always welcomed new ideas and practices, and at the same time it does not usually discard the old As a result, we find in Hinduism the most profound philosophical speculations, existing side by side with the most primitive magical ideas, sublime ethical conceptions with gross rituals, worship of one God with the worship of serpents and trees etc

Hinduism is different from other world religions in that it neither owes its origin to a single prophet or religious leader, nor does it have an organised church, or a single determinate creed In the absence of any central church, Hinduism has ever been in the process of change, absorbing new ideas

and creeds and modifying older ones under the impact of the new The most important fact to be noted in this context is that Hinduism is not a product of a single people, as Christianity and Islam are Instead, it is the outcome of the interaction between the Aryans and the non-Aryans (Dravidians?) It is generally agreed that when the Aryans came to India they found it already inhabited by people(s) with perhaps richer and more developed civilization(s) From the Vedas to Purānas there are innumerable references to wars between *asuras* (demons) and *devas* (gods, presumably the Aryans) Sanskrit texts also speak of various tribes as Vanara, Nisāda, Nāga, Yavana, Kirata, Dravida, Śaka and Āndhra [5]

Rāmāyana gives us impressive details of the cities of *vānaras* (monkeys) and *rākṣasas* (demons), as consisting of palatial buildings and beautiful gardens, inhabited by good-looking, well-dressed, soft-spoken natives, engaged in the pursuit of music and other arts [6] Such descriptions clearly indicate the high level of civilization reached by the non-Aryan natives of India and belie the Aryans' nomenclature of them as monkeys or demons

At first, the Aryans kept aloof from the non-Aryans They tried to preserve their racial purity through the device of hardened caste rules which prohibited marriage outside one's caste Yet such marriages always took place Śantanu, the grandsire of the Kauravas and Pandavas, married Matsyagandha, a girl belonging to the fishermen's tribe Arjuna married Ulūpī, belonging to the Naga tribe, and Bhīma married Hidimba, a *rāksasi* King Yayāti married the daughter of the teacher of *asuras*, the enemies of the gods (Aryans), and so on The classifications of different kinds of marriage and their progeny, found in all the *Dharmasāstras*[7], are just an attempt to give religio-legal sanction to such unorthodox unions The non-Aryans were thus gradually abosrbed into the Hindu society, though they often retained some of their indivi-daul customs, social norms and gods For example, Arjuna and Krsna's son and grandson married their cousins, even though such marriages are strictly prohibited in the Hindu Law-codes There are other similarly interesting stories in the two Epics, suggestive of a matriarchal social organization and a social milieu very different from those of the Aryans

Gradually a total amalgamation of these different peoples (except a few tribes) was effected through constant interaction, so that we now have neither Aryans nor Dravidians, nor any other people, but only Indians (or Hindus)

The *modus operandi* of this amalgamation is not clear The conservative opinion, as represented by Prof P V Kane, favours the possibility that the non-Aryans were absorbed into the Hindu society as sūdras Prof Kane points out that the word *varna* used for distinguishing social classes in the ancient Sanskrit literature, means colour He argues that though the three classes of brahmanas, ksatriyas and vaisyas were distinguished in the Vedic society, there was a much sharper demarcation between the Aryans and the *dāsas* or *dasyus*, suggesting that the two peoples were of different colours [8] The Dharmasastras make a sharp distinction between the three twice-born (*dvija*) 'upper' classes and the sūdras Gautama refers to the employer of a sūdra as an Arya, suggesting that the sūdras were non-Aryans [9] The respective nomenclatures, Arya for the three 'upper' classes and dasa or dasyu (slave) for the sūdras, the use of the term *varna* (colour) for classes and the extreme ill-treatment that was meted out to the sūdras, all suggest the possibility that the latter were actually non-Aryans

At the same time, non-Aryan natives of India boasted of very high standards of civilization, and were probably even more advanced in many fields than the Aryans It, therefore, does not seem very likely that they would have all accepted the lower-most position of sūdras in the Aryan society Protima Bowes[10] argues that possibly the non-Aryans also had their class distinctions like the Aryans For example, *Mahābhārata* speaks of the teacher of *asuras* as a brahmana It is possible, therefore, that the non-Aryans were absorbed into classes (*varnas*) parallel to those to which they originally belonged As late as 4th or 5th century A D the nomadic tribes of Śakas, Kusanas, Ābhīras and Hūnas from central Asia were absorbed into the Hindu society Significantly, they were accommodated somewhere in the middle rung of the social hierarchy Probably, those who were absorbed into the Hindu (Aryan) society were asked to form new sub-castes, which also explains the later prohibition of marriages and even dining between sub-castes

There is a very interesting confirmation of this view in *Gautama Dharmasūtra*

"If the Aryans and the non-Aryans interchange their occupations and conduct, (there is) equality (between them) "[11]

Interestingly, the same text has been quoted by Prof P V Kane in support of his thesis that the Hindu thinkers mostly made a sharp distinction between the Aryans and the non-Aryans Due to want of any historical evidence we can never be sure of the exact facts about the ancient Hindu society But we can still be fairly sure that the Aryans did confront other civilized peoples(s), and that the present-day Hindu culture is so complex, varied and heterogeneous that it is best explained on the hypothesis of more than one source

(ii) The Aryan religion and philosophy were constantly being modified by the inclusion of non-Aryan ideas, beliefs and even gods The 'religio-culture' that has emerged as a result of the constant interaction between the Aryans and the non-Aryans is a very complex one Some scholars call it Hinduism in contradistinction to the early Aryan or Vedic religion which is named Brahmanism by them[12] Hindus themselves do not subscribe to this division and trace their religion directly to the Vedas We have accepted this distinction for reasons which will become clear as we proceed with our study If we were to compare modern Hinduism with the Vedic religion, we would find that it contains a lot in the form of beliefs, rituals and values that can be directly traced to the Vedas But it also contains so much else which has been apparently absorbed from some other source(s), that it cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the Vedic religion For example, several Hindu gods and goddesses show possible non-Aryan influence R G Bhandarkar has analysed the concepts of two main Hindu deities—Visnu and Śiva, and found that they are composite concepts, some of their constituent ideas being possibly derived from non-Aryan sources[13] The concept of the mother-goddess is still more significant, as it is more or less absent in the Vedas Similarly, image worship which is so basic to the present-day Hinduism was unknown in the Vedic and post-Vedic periods, whereas there are indications that it was practised by the people of the Sindhu Valley civilization, and so on

If we try to analyze the extremely complex 'religio-culture' of present-day Hinduism, we can easily distinguish two divergent traditions, one world-and-life-affirming and the other world-and-life-negating, to borrow the famous twin phrases of Albert Schweitzer The two traditions have continued almost side by side in Hinduism and are in constant interaction, but have never been fully synthesized According to Surama Dasgupta

"Two different currents flowed in different courses (fiom the Vedas), one in the ritualistic line, then in social and legal laws and rules of conduct in the Sūtras and Dharmasastras, and the other in the intellectual and spiritual aspect, culminating in the Upanisads and thence in so many philosophical systems These two ideals are entirely different types "[14]

While Surama Dasgupta thinks that both these currents of thought emanated from one source, the Vedas, others attribute them to two separate sources Prof G C Pande thinks that the contrast between the two approaches is so fundamental and far-reaching that it warrants the supposition of two divergent ethoses, probably originating among two separate peoples According to him,

"The Vedic search for the spirit did not deny the world It rather accepted the world as a gift and an expression of Divine reality The Upanisadic quest seeks to go beyond the life of worldliness and ritualism centred in action, but does not usually advocate a radical renunciation of all life of action Nor does it condemn the world as a vale of tears, although it recognizes the unsatisfactory character of worldly goods and gains and stresses the need for spiritual enlightenment A quite different *weltanschauung* is expressed in the spiritual quest and thought of the wandering ascetics and mendicants whom we meet in the 6th century B C in north-eastern India "

He further observes,

"Mendicancy was in fact a Śramanic institute His spiritual quest was in sharp contrast to the Vedic one in its attitude towards action and social obligations Mendicancy implied an irreversible and final rejection of all social claims and obligations and of the efficacy of natural or ritual action in the context of spiritual seeking

"There may be substantive identity between the Upanisadic ideal and the Śramanic ideal (But) it is undeniable that they represented originally distinct approaches and conceptions It is only through the interaction of these two traditions that the Upanisads came to be understood as *nivrtti-laksana* and opposed to the earlier Vedic tradition, characterized as *pravrtti-laksana* by the great Vedic scholar Śamkara "[15]

Prof G C Pande is a profound scholar of both Buddhism and Vedānta, not given to hasty generalizations, and his views are to be respected But sometimes the thesis of two sources of Hindu culture is presented in such a sweeping manner,[16] that it becomes a mere cliche having no historical basis The two ethoses found intermixed in the Hindu religio-culture are so distinct that we are often tempted to attribute them to two different peoples, the Aryans and the non-Aryans At the same time, this is too simplistic an explanation to the very complex phenomenon of Hinduism It does not explain how Buddhism and Jainism with their marked world-and-life-negation originated among the Aryan ksatriyas, and how south India is still a stronghold of what we usually call Brahmanism, even though we prefer to understand it as the Dravida region

The diversity of Hinduism could well have originated within the Aryan society itself It seeks that the ksatriya kings not only refused to accept the supremacy of brahmanas in the society, they also rejected the religion of the latter [17] Probably a very different intellectual atmosphere prevailed in the court circles of ksatriya kings, where long philosophical debates weie held in which brahmanas also participated The Upanisads refer to several ksatriya kings who were foremost among the teachers of the knowledge of *Brahman* Thus, not only the heterodox sects of Jainism and Buddhism, but the Samkhya and Vedānta also seem to have developed among the ksatriyas Strange though it may seem, the ideal of *ahimsā* also seems to have originated among the Aryan ksatriyas, since there does not seem to be much scope for it in the ritualistic religion of the brahmanas [18]

The above discussion suggests that we can never be sure regarding the source(s) of the diversity of Hinduism But we can still be very sure of the fact that the Hindu 'religio-culture' contains ideas, beliefs and attitudes which are quite divergent

and even mutually incompatible This fact is very important for a proper understanding of Hindu Dharma It also provides the scope for a reformulation of Hindu philosophy of religion and morality, as we shall see in the last chapter

III Development of Hindu Moral Ideas Through the Interaction of the Two Religio-moral Traditions

As we have seen in the previous section, Hindu Dharma as it is today is the end result of a long process of interaction between two major and many minor religio-moral traditions The emergence of this synthetic Hindu 'religio-culture' is best understood in historical perspective

(1) The Vedic 'religio-culture' represents the first stage of the development of the complex Hindu Dharma, including Hindu morality The Vedic Aryans were a vigorous people who loved the good things of life and frankly desired and prayed to gods for boons like plenty of cattle, rains, food and sons Certain Western scholars contend that this positive attitude is no more found in post-Vedic Hindu culture which they characterize as negative and decadent [19] Such thinkers are entirely mistaken about the philosophy and ethos of Hinduism

The world-and-life-affirming spirit of the Vedas has persisted in Hinduism through the ages, though it is no more as naive and unconditional as it was in the Vedas Thinkers like N K Devaraja and K Satchidananda Murty[20] have argued in detail for the positive world-and-life-affirming spirit of Hinduism with the help of copious quotes from Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit literature It will suffice here to point out that the Vedic-Hindu culture is rich in mundane values and is generally characterized by a positive or affirmative attitude towards the world and life For example, the seer of *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* desires to live a hundred years performing actions in the right spirit, and the teacher of *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* prays for fortune which includes clothes, cattle, food, drink and also many students, renown and fame [21]

In later Hinduism this positive attitude is all the more pronounced Prosperity (*artha*) and fulfilment of desires (*kāma*) are given due importance, provided they are pursued according to righteousness (*dharma*), and the three together form the three

human goals (*trivarga*) recognized in all the texts[22] Manu recommends that one should desire the goddess of wealth (Laksmī) till death[23] A typical prayer found in one of the Smrtis expresses the extremely positive and affirmative Hindu attitude to world and life

"O, Thou, endowed with lordly powers, give me beauty, fame, good luck, grant me sons and riches, and confer on me all desired objects"[24]

All the characters of *Mahābhārata* sing praises of wealth, saying that no other human value, not even righteousness (*dharma*), can be pursued without wealth[25] Even today, Laksmī, the goddess of prosperity and good fortune, is one of the most popular deities in Hindu homes Religious festivals and social functions are occasions for lavish spending of wealth which is greatly admired by the masses The Aryans' love and admiration for world and life are responsible for their unconditional approbation of the life of the householder It is asserted that a householder alone can realize for himself all the values of life, as well as provide sustenance and support to all other sections of the society[26] The original Aryan ethos is thus not only a positive one, it is also one of aggressive self-assertion and effort According to *Mahābhārata*

"One should never give up effort, even if failure is almost a certainty If a man acts, there are two possibilities that he may or may not succeed, but if he does not act at all, there is only one possibility that he would never realize his end"

And,

"It is only right for a man never to insult himself, thinking himself to be insignificant, because those who belittle themselves can never acquire fortune or glory"[27]

The ancient Aryans were pragmatic people who even accepted violence as an integral part of life on the plea that it is unavoidable in everyday life[28] Even *Bhagavadgītā* uses the philosophical beliefs regarding the immortality of the soul and transmigration as arguments in support of Arjuna's duty to wage the war[29] In fact, killing was the accepted duty of ksatriyas in the ancient Hindu society, and it was assured that a ksatriya who is killed in war goes to heaven[30] In addition, the king was expected to exercise *danda* or punishment which was even hailed as the only

means to preserve the social order and keep people on the path of righteousness [31]

This Vedic-Hindu approach was also socio-centric The Vedic seers cherished and prayed for the harmony of thoughts, actions and interests among various members of the society [32] Religion has all through provided a solid basis for social integration in Hinduism Socio-cultural functions are presided over by priests and performed with Vedic *mantras* in the Hindu society, or we may say that the Hindu religious rites always have a socio-cultural connotation For example, the marriage ceremony is performed with elaborate religious rituals, but the chief significance of marriage lies neither in its religious function, nor in its being a personal concern of two individuals, but in its being a social institution The girl is married not to an individual, but into a family, and the couple start their new life with a very clear concept of their duties towards their family and the society The original Aryan world-view affirms an organic relation between the individual and the society and emphasizes his indebtedness to his parents, teachers and fellow beings [33]

Hereditary caste system has long governed not only the Hindu social organization, but also the Hindu way of life It is responsible for the various evils of Hindu society and morality, and there is no justification whatsoever for its continuance in modern times But in its original conception the division of society into classes (*varnas*) was developed with a view to social stability and harmony In a caste-oriented social organization the interests of the society are the governing consideration in determining the individual's life According to the Advaita philosopher Suresvara

"Duties of four classes lead to common welfare, even as a palanquin is carried by four persons "[34]

This world-and-life-affirming ethos is closely linked with and strengthened by Hindu polytheism and ritualism The Vedic seers performed their rituals and worshipped their gods with specific desires in mind The old Vedic gods and rituals have long since been replaced by new Hindu gods and simpler Puranic rituals But the motivation behind the worship of new gods and the performance of later rituals is the same, namely, the desire

for the well-being and prosperity of the family Hindu polytheism is thus constantly strengthened by Hindu appreciation of mundane goods, and vice versa

The world-and-life-affirmation and the social orientation of the original Aryan tradition has had a very positive influence on Hindu ethics The moral values and virtues that are affirmed in this tradition are conceived in a pragmatic and social context Thus, apart from truth (*satya*), magnanimity (*dāna*) is the most admired virtue of Vedic 'religio-culture' Performing one's religio-moral duties and self-effort are some of the other virtues admired in the Vedic-Dharmasāstric tradition

The simple religion of Vedas gradually deteriorated into an extreme form of externalistic ritualism in Brāhmanas (around 1000 B C) Brahmanas developed Vedic sacrifices into extremely complicated and elaborate affairs and asserted that the correct performance of Vedic ritual(s) automatically resulted in the realization of the desired fruit(s) by the performer This externalistic approach undermined both religious piety and the moral point of view The Brāhmanical ritualism generally equated moral duty with the performance of Vedic rituals, which further confused the moral point of view The overriding emphasis on rituals led to the excessive importance of brahmana priests and thereby strengthened the division of society into hereditary castes

Though most of the Vedic rituals have now become obsolete, the spirit or approach of the ritualistic religion of the Vedas continues to characterize the present-day Hindu Dharma and enjoys a determinative influence on Hindu morality Thus, the Vedic 'religio-culture' and all the subsequent stages of the development of Hindu religion and morality are not to be understood as merely stages or phases which Hinduism passed through centuries ago Rather, every period of Hindu history has contributed to its immense richness and diversity and has survived in it in the form of certain beliefs, values and practices The usual historical approach generally fails to appreciate this continuity of Hinduism

(ii) The second stage of the development of Hindu Dharma (which includes both Hindu religio-philosophy and morality) is the one which gave birth to all the great philosophies of India A great intellectual and spiritual unrest and an urge to question

and find answers to the ultimate mystery of life seem to have stirred the Aryans, especially the ksatriyas, near about the 6th century B C Jainism, Buddhism, Samkhya and Vedanta are the products of this spiritual unrest All of them express the dissatisfaction felt by the intellectual elite of the society against the externalistic approach and violence of Vedic rituals The various religio-philosophic systems of this period rejected not only the Vedic religion, but also its goals like prosperity here and heaven hereafter Instead, they sought to transcend them in their quest of liberation Though they conceived liberation very differently, and also put forward very different ontologies, they shared their spiritual urge and their conviction that the quest of liberation is to be undertaken by turning the mind away from the world and towards the reality within oneself These philosophies were probably developed independently, but there was continuous interaction between them

The Vedantic monism was conceived during the same period (approximately between 1000 to 500 B C) Its philosophy and valuational approach were developed in conscious contradiction to the Brāhmanical ritualism Upanisads criticize the performers of Vedic sacrifices as blind men led by the blind,[35] and emphasize the worth of inner spirit and experience, as against the external acts They also affirm the goal of liberation and understand it in terms of mystico-unitive experience Since liberation can be achieved only through some kind of intuitive realization of the metaphysical truth, neither ritualistic acts, nor ethical conduct can directly be instrumental to the realization of liberation And yet, ethical discipline and conduct are greatly valued in the Vedantic tradition as a necessary pre-requisite of any quest of liberation [36] The most cherished virtues of this tradition are those of self-culture like knowledge of metaphysical truth (*vidyā* or *viveka*), dispassion (*vairāgya*) and control of the senses and mind (*dama* and *sama*), though kindness and forgiveness are also appreciated

Like all mysticism, the Upanisadic mystical philosophy is also transcendentalist in its approach and emphasis, but it is not directly world-and-life-negating Since the inner Self is also the Creator and the Inner-controller of the world diversity,[37] the latter is not illusory or worthless in the Upanisads, as in the

later Advaita Vedānta That is why, the renunciation of the world (*samnyāsa*) is not mandatory in them In fact, the basic philosophy and valuational approach of Upanisads is much more balanced and positive than that of Advaita Vedānta and later Hinduism

At about the same time (660 B C onwards), the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism were being developed, (Jainism is possibly older) The supposedly orthodox system of Sāmkhya was also probably developed independently during the same period As convincingly argued by Prof G C Pande, the three religio-philosophical systems of Sāmkhya, Buddhism and Jainism have much in common and express a very different ethos from that of Vedanta Here we are mainly concerned with Samkhya which has been recognised as an orthodox system in Hinduism The ontology, world-view and valuational approach of Samkhya are very different from those of the Vedic-Vedantic tradition And yet, Samkhya is the second most important philosophy of Hinduism, the first being Vedanta In fact, most of the inner tensions and inconsistencies of Hinduism can be traced to this double influence

Samkhya posits two ultimate realities, *purusa* (self) and *prakrti* (nature) It believes in the plurality of selves, transmigratory existence and the essential duality between self and nature (or body), and conceives liberation as the self's realization of its original pure being Samkhya also believes in the world as full of suffering and asserts the right of the individual to reject all his socio-moral obligations for the sake of his personal liberation On the other hand, Vedānta affirms an all-comprehending Absolute, the reality or Self of all individual selves, as well as of the objective world Though Upanisads seem to be familiar with the ideas of karma and transmigratory existence, there are indications that these were rather new ideas for the Upanisadic seers [38] And the idea of the world as full of suffering and hence undesirable is unknown in the Vedic-Vedantic tradition

And yet, Advaita Vedantins conceive their Absolute (*Ātman-Brahman*) in terms of the Samkhya *puruṣa* and liberation (*moksa*) in terms of the Samkhya *kaivalya* The popular religious texts, *Bhagavadgitā*, *Mahābhārata* and Puranas, have uncritically

accepted the entire Samkhya cosmology, including its doctrine of the plurality of souls and transmigratory existence

Not only the authors of the popular religious works, but later Advaitins also accepted the Buddhist-Jaina-Samkhya perception of the world as full of suffering, and hence undesirable, a perception so unlike the joyous approach of the Vedic Aryans This new perception has engendered in the Hindu mind a morbid fear of getting involved in the transmigratory existence and a desire to escape therefrom through the renunciation of the world The world-and-life-negation inherent in this approach has had a considerable influence on Hindu morality

The later Vedāntins further imbibed the extreme individualism that goes with the Samkhya ontology A closer look at the two world-views and valuational approaches would reveal the diversity of the two points of view Yet, even though Vedanta remains the basic philosophy of Hinduism, Hindu thinkers have incorporated in their thought both Samkhya ontology and its individualism The latter has had far-reaching negative ramifications for Hindu morality

(iii) Dharmasastras (including both Dharmasūtras and Smrtis), the two Epics (*Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*) and Puranas represent the third stage of the development of Hindu religio-philosophy They were written and finalised during a very long period, stretching approximately from about 5th century B C to 15th century A D These religious texts do not propound any well-defined system of philosophy or religion Yet they express a very important tradition of Hinduism which has gradually become coextensive with entire Hinduism We can call it popular or synthetic tradition which is the outcome of prolonged interaction between the two religio-philosophical traditions and persistent efforts to synthesize their diverse beliefs, ideas and valuational attitudes The Dharmasastras are in the direct line of the Vedic tradition, though they reflect the influence of the second tradition also and even seek to reconcile the two The Epics show a much more marked intermixing of the two philosophies and valuational approaches The Puranas are another important source of this synthetic religion and morality of popular Hinduism, and contain all the diverse beliefs, values and attitudes that are found in any of the above traditions of Hinduism

There are indications of initial antagonism for the creed of world-renunciation among the supporters of the Vedic tradition Thus, different characters of *Mahābhārata* express divergent philosophico-ethical standpoints and their arguments and counter-arguments make interesting reading Yudhisthira, being overwhelmed by the violence and destruction involved in the Mahabhārata war, wanted to give up his kingdom and become a recluse He argued passionately for absolute freedom, peace and transcendence of worldly concerns enjoyed by a renunciant His wife, brothers and friends were shocked by such an unmanly desire and rebuked him in no uncertain terms They declared the life of renunciation as unmanly, unworthy of a king, and even denounced it as un-Vedic The only life worth living, according to them, is one of manly action, dedicated to the pursuit of three goals of prosperity, desire fulfilment and righteousness The long dialogue between Yudhisthira, his brothers and his wife[39] suggests the relative independence of the two traditions Similarly, *Moksādharma Parva* of *Mahābhārata* discusses liberation, but this discussion is constantly interrupted in order to discuss petty rituals, the importance of brahmanas etc Perhaps till the time of the Epics the creed of renunciation was not fully developed or defined and its implications were not properly understood, it was even less popular

Various syntheses of the two traditional viewpoints have been attempted in Dharmasastras and the Epics The Dharmasastric scheme of four goals of life (*purusārthas*), viz *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (prosperity), *kāma* (pleasure) and *moksa* (liberation), is one such attempt to synthesize the two rather divergent viewpoints As we shall see in the course of our study, the group of first three goals (*trivarga*) is inconsistent with the final goal of liberation In fact, the proper eschatological goal of a life dedicated to the realization of the first three goals should have been heaven which has been frankly recognized by various religious texts[40] Still, instead of heaven, liberation is included as the fourth and final goal of human life It is argued that the first three are the legitimate goals for the first half of a man's life, while liberation is the proper goal of the latter half This brings us to the scheme of four stages of life (*āsramas*), i e those of the student celibate (*brahmacarya*), the householder (*grahastha*),

the forest dweller (*vānaprastha*) and the renunciant (*saṃnyāsa*). There is also a very significant stipulation in *Dharmaśāstras* that a man must not renounce the world without first fulfilling all his socio-moral obligations.[41] This stipulation in a way bridged the gulf between the two valuational approaches, and it was only when this condition was removed that the two ways of life, i.e. those of activity (*pravṛtti*) and withdrawal from activity (*nivṛtti*), were seen as mutually inconsistent and irreconcilable. Again, the first two or even three stages of life express an ethos, entirely different from that of the stage of renunciation which seeks to transcend all the distinctions and values of the first three stages of life.[42] As we shall see in the third chapter *infra*, even though the scheme of four stages of life was formally meant for males of the three upper classes, it was practised by a few spiritually inclined people only.

The two traditions of an active life-in-the-world (*pravṛtti*) and renunciation of the world (*nivṛtti*) have mostly flourished side by side in Hinduism to this day. At the same time, the impact of the second tradition has been intensely felt by the followers of the first tradition. Pessimistic sentiments denouncing life-in-the-world and exalting world-renunciation are found in all Hindu religious texts. Hindus even now admire and venerate the renunciant above all, though they themselves may be leading a very mundane life. The virtues of the second tradition have also been incorporated in the morality of popular religious texts which mainly subscribe to the first, i.e. Vedic world-view. This is amply borne out by the development of the ideal of *ahiṃsā* (*non-injury*) in Hinduism.

As we know, the early Aryan way of life was not particularly given to the ideal of non-violence, while it is the central creed of the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism. At first the Hindu thinkers tried to reconcile the two approaches by saying that all violence is a sin, except that done for the purpose of Vedic rituals.[43] A more meaningful synthesis was later on achieved through the development of non-violent sacrifices in which cereals, butter etc. are poured into the fire.[44] Significantly, while the virtue of *ahiṃsā* is only half-heartedly recognized in Dharmasastras which are the true heirs to the Vedic tradition, it finds a much stronger exposition in *Mahābhārata*. Non-violence is

declared to be the highest duty by the Epic [45] But it was only with the development of the theistic-devotional (Bhakti) tradition that the ideal of non-violence was fully integrated into the Hindu ethos

In addition to non-violence, Dharmasāstras and Epics appreciate and recommend almost all the conceivable personal and inter-personal moral virtues Sometimes the two sets of virtues, associated with the above two approaches, were reconciled by the artificial device of ascribing them to different stages of life, or different classes of people Thus, brahmanas and renunciants were expected to be non-violent, forgiving, forbearing and equable towards all and under all circumstances, whereas the ksatriyas and the householders in general were expected to be extremely active, dutiful and magnanimous A more meaningful synthesis of the two classes of virtues is achieved in *Bhagavadgitā*'s ideal of the selfless performance of one's duties with kindness and equanimity towards all

This brings us to *Bhagavadgitā* which is a part of the present *Mahābhārata* and is the greatest syncretizing work, ever produced by man It accepts from the Vedic tradition the idea of the meaningfulness of the world creation and the necessity of everyone's performing one's allotted duties in order to contribute to the maintenance of the world-order [46] From the Samkhya tradition it accepts the doctrines of karma, transmigratory existence,[47] the dualism of the self and the body-mind complex and the transcendent, actionless nature of the self [48] It seeks to reconcile all these heterogeneous ideas in its ideal of desireless performance of all actions It then adds Vedantic theism to this unique conglomeration, and concludes that the duties should be performed with detachment, equanimity and a spirit of total self-surrender to the Lord [49]

The Puranic period followed that of the Epics and was co-extensive with a very long period of Hindu 'religio-culture' (from 600 A D to about 1500 A D) The most significant characteristic of the Puranic approach was its new-found concern for the masses who were so far neglected by the Hindu elite But in their eagerness to provide a religion that could satisfy the needs of the masses, the Puranic authors adopted a very irrational (mythological) approach to religion and morality The religion

of Puranas is polytheistic and ritualistic, their world-view is marred by their obsession with the other world, and the morality advocated by them is often stale, reactionary and superficial. And yet, in between so much that is inane and worthless, we find glimpses of genuine moral awareness and appreciation of highest moral values The distinction between the two valuational approaches is obliterated in Puranas which advocate the virtues of magnanimity, compassion and non-injury, alongside those of detachment and equanimity

(iv) The Bhakti movement signifies the fourth stage of the development of Hindu Dharma Though historically it was concurrent with the Puranic period, its spirit and valuational approach are mostly different from those of Puranas The Bhakti tradition originated with the Ālwar saints of Karnataka in the last two centuries before Christ, spread to Maharashtra and then to the north, and continued to dominate Hindu thought and life till about 16th century A D It was developed in contradistinction to Vedic 'religio-culture' Its greatest contribution to Hindu morality lies in its rejection of the relevance of caste distinctions in determining the worth of a person Significantly, most of the Bhakti saints came from lower classes Many of the saints were householders They lived and preached among the masses and thus helped in sustaining a pretty high level of religio-moral consciousness among the Hindus through a very long period of their history

This theistic-devotional tradition is essentially Vedantic in its philosophy and world-view It has achieved a unique, though not so philosophical, synthesis of Vedantic monism and theistic-devotional approach in religion The Lord in this tradition is at once the object of intense devotion (*ekāntika bhakti*) and the innermost Self of all There was also some influence of Islamic monotheism on some of the later devotional saints like Kabīr and Guru Nanak But the devotional tradition has been intensely monotheistic since the very beginning, and so the influence of Islam only strengthened its own religious perception

In its original conception, the devotional philosophy is not world-and-life negating At the same time, like all mysticism the world over, it has an inner urge for transcendence of the world and its values in order to enjoy the unitive experience The

morality recommended in this tradition is one of spontaneous goodness, love and kindness for all.

(v) The fifth stage of the development of Hindu Dharma begins with the modern age of Indian history. It was preceded by the darkest period of Indian history during the first two centuries of the British rule (from the later half of 17th century to the first half of 19th century). The nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented intellectual and spiritual awakening in the Hindu society. Raja Rammohan Roy (last quarter of eighteenth century) heralded the Hindu renaissance which was carried forward by such spirituo-moral giants as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar and Mahatma Gandhi. Innumerable social reformers, political leaders, intellectuals and scientists contributed towards the liberation of the Hindu mind from the shackles of dogmas and taboos that oppressed it for the past several centuries. There was a marked difference in the philosophy and values of the various thinkers, religious leaders and social reformers of this period. Between them they represented the whole spectrum of the rich Hindu 'religio-culture'. Thus, Ramakrishna Paramahansa was the paradigm of devotional mysticism (*bhakti-mārga*), Ramana Maharshi was a contemplative mystic who exemplified the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*), Sri Aurobindo was, of course, the epitome of the yogic *sādhanā* (discipline) and Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were ideal men of action (*karmayogins*).

At the same time, they all shared certain beliefs and values which characterize the Hindu renaissance. First, all Hindu thinkers of this period were fired by an intense pride for the ancient Hindu religio-cultural heritage. Whether it was Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati or Swami Vivekananda, they all looked towards the ancient Hindu philosophy and religion for inspiration and guidance. They also idealized the ancient culture and morality and often presented it as a panacea for all the evils of the present-day society.[50]

Secondly, almost all the leaders of Hindu [illegible]h the exception of Swami Dayananda, had We[illegible] educa[illegible] were influenced by modern Western methods of rational inqu[illegible]

as also by modern humanitarian and liberal ideas. As we shall see in chapter IV *infra*, ancient Hindu thinkers were capable of the most sublime philosophical vision and religious insight, but they hardly ever tried to develop the practical implications of their vision. In contrast, many modern thinkers, specially Swami Vivekananda, sought to give a new and more meaningful interpretation to the Vedāntic vision of one Self in all and made it the basis of a moral philosophy of the dignity of man as man, the equality of all men and man's duty of love and service of his fellow beings.[51] Other Hindu thinkers like Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen and Mahatma Gandhi were similarly influenced by Western liberalism and rationalism, and quite successfully tried to synthesize modern Western values with ancient Hindu philosophy. It goes to the credit of Hinduism that it could accept and absorb radically new ideas and values without in any way feeling endangered by the onslaught of Western thought.

Thirdly, unlike the ancient Hindu thinkers and saints, modern thinkers were eager for social reforms. Perhaps due to the impact of Western thought, they were intensely conscious of the religio-social evils that afflicted the contemporary Hindu society, and attacked them on two fronts, intellectual and practical. Thus, Raja Rammohan Roy successfully campaigned against the inhuman practice of *sati* (self-immolation of widows), and both Swami Dayananda and Mahatma Gandhi waged an incessant war against the hereditary caste system and the practice of untouchability. Many thinkers and social reformers successfully campaigned against caste discriminations, the practice of untouchability and the unjust treatment of womenfolk in the Hindu society. Ishwara Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal and Jyoti Rao Phule, D. K. Karve and M. G. Ranade in Maharashtra were the pioneers of the struggle for the rights of women, such as equal education, widow marriage etc. Other thinkers of Hindu renaissance like Keshab Chandra Sen, reformers like Swami Dayananda and Jyoti Rao Phule criticized and actively preached against such religious practices as idolatry and polytheism.

Lastly, there was an unprecedented emphasis on personal moral conduct, the employment of fair means to achieve the right ends and the individual's obligations towards the whole

of society All religious thinkers and socio-political leaders of this period were the epitomes of integrity, sincerity and selflessness Both, the national movement and public life, were governed by highest moral norms, which makes this period the pinnacle of Hindu socio-moral thought and conduct The contemporary Hindu society falls much short of the level of idealism and morality that was achieved not only by the leaders, but also by the masses during that glorious period of Indian history Hinduism has been immensely enriched by the lasting contribution of these spirtuo-moral giants of the Hindu renaissance in the fields of thought, morality and social reform, and it will never be the same again after them

Hinduism thus comes to us as a dynamic religion which has never been presented as a finished product Several different religio-philosophical traditions and innumerable generations of thinkers, saints and reformers have contributed to its immense richness and complexity, so that it is ever changing under the impact of new ideas and its own inner dynamism

IV Causes of the Diversity of Hinduism and Its Immense Adaptability

If someone were to call Hinduism polytheistic, he would be right to a limited extent, and if another described it as monistic, he would also be right, as would be the person who understood it as basically theistic Some misguided critics call it pantheistic, others soul-centric, and they all find some sort of documentary evidence in support of their mutually contradictory theses But this is not all, Hinduism also includes in it such lowly beliefs and practices, as the worship of innumerable petty deities, and even trees, snakes and stones

(1) The question then arises as to how and why such diverse and even self-contradictory practices have continued to flourish side by side in Hinduism Several related explanations of this unique phenomenon are given First, it is argued that Hindus worship the 'Divine' in many forms, but know that they are worshipping the same Reality Sarasvati Chennakesavan has expressed this idea eloquently

"Each man worships God in the form that most appeals to him and attracts him When this idea is combined with the idea

that God is one, although He appears in many forms, we have the gist of Hindu theology Every thing great and useful like the rivers, every thing that is strong and monstrous like the creeping contagious diseases are Gods Evil and good, destruction and preservation are God "[52]

Now, though Ms Chennakesavan implies as if she is presenting one single argument, in fact the above passage contains two quite unrelated assertions While the first refers to the basic Hindu faith that the one 'Divine' is worshipped in many forms, the second asserts that the worship of natural forces, inanimate objects and diseases is inspired by the vision of one 'Divine' 'as' all But the mystical vision of ultimate unity need not inspire the worship of the Supreme in His lowest manifestations Rather, such objects are worshipped by the aborigines, because their minds are incapable of rising to a higher perception of the 'One' It is much more likely, therefore, that such practices were borrowed from the tribes that co-inhabited India along with the Aryans

The first part of the above argument is more relevant This argument was first formulated by Swami Vivekananda According to it, Hinduism is widely tolerant and accepts all faiths and gods as so many ways to the one Truth Not only does Hinduism respect all other faiths, but it is also ready to assimilate any beliefs, values or practices of other faiths which may appeal to it The ignorant criticism that Hinduism makes no distinction between higher and lower forms of faith is wrong Hinduism does make such a distinction, though at the same time, it does not condemn the lower as trivial or blasphemous But, why do we need to preserve the lower faiths in the face of the higher one? And if the lower faiths are not to be condemned and destroyed, should they not be transformed and spiritualized?

This leads us to the second rational explanation or rationalization of the immense diversity of Hinduism in the form of the theory of *adhikāra-bheda* The doctrine is quite common, but like the doctrines of karma and transmigratory existence, it is generally taken for granted and not clearly formulated It was again Swami Vivekananda who first used it for a rational defence of Hinduism According to it, different men have different temperaments, intellectual and emotional needs and equally different capacities,

so that one uniform creed cannot possibly suit all persons Hinduism, therefore, gives the freedom to choose the creed or god (*istā devatā*) that appeals most to a man's temperament and intellectual capacity, and is best capable of eliciting a proper religious response out of that particular nature [53] Vivekananda further argued that if a man is allowed to practise the creed that suits his needs most, he would gradually rise to higher levels of religious experience through his own creed But the writer cannot see how, if one is allowed to indulge in lowest religious practices like the worship of trees and road side stones, one could thereby rise to higher levels of religious experience The Purānas always aimed at providing the masses with a religion that would appeal to their illiterate minds most While the Hindu intellectual elite, the philosophers and seers, developed esoteric philosophies which were clearly out of the reach of the masses, Puranas provided them with a very large variety of dogmatic beliefs and practices, along with the promise that these would lead them to heaven or even liberation Excepting the Bhakti movement, there was never any genuine attempt to raise the masses above the lowly level of popular religion

There are other possible causes of the diversity of Hinduism One obvious cause, of course, is the absence of any central authority or church in Hinduism This has given vast scope for self-expression and genuine religious experience to the individual On the other hand, the lack of any central authority has encouraged the writers of Hindu religious texts to indulge in unforgivable flights of imagination regarding gods, rituals and their various fruits, thus misleading the innocent and credulous masses

Another possible explanation of the immense variety of Hinduism is diametrically opposed to the rational explanation mentioned earlier That the Hindus worship so many gods may not be because they have a vision of one 'Divine' in all, but because they are basically a polytheistic people The polytheists, unlike the theists, are naturally a tolerant lot If they are already worshipping so many gods, they can easily worship a few more !

Hindu thinkers have always been trying to reconcile various religio-philosophical approaches and overcome the contradictions between high philosophical affirmations and lowly social

practices One such philosophic device used to reconcile the varying world-views and approaches is the distinction drawn between the transcendent truth (*pāramārthika satya*) and the empirical truth (*vyāvahārika satya*) This distinction between the two levels of truth helped Śaṃkara in advocating the empirical reality of the world, along with its transcendental unreality Śaṃkara could also thereby accept the continuity in the empirical dealings of a man of realization who is convinced of the ultimate non-duality and the illusoriness of the world [54] It is implied that the ultimate truth need not interfere with man's empirical dealings To a certain extent this is a right approach to mundane life But in a socio-moral context the practice of adopting double standards has often led to intellectual inconsistency and unconscious hypocrisy in men's inter-personal dealings Thus, Śaṃkara could at once assert the ultimate universal Self as beyond all class distinctions,[55] and also advocate a very discriminatory and even cruel treatment of sūdras,[56] on the plea that while the first assertion refers to the ultimate truth, the second is relevant in the empirical context (*vyavahāra*) only

(ii) A few more things should be observed here First, in spite of its immence diversity and complexity, Hinduism does have a certain vision, underlying all its changing phases through the centuries It is the vision of the all-comprehending 'Divine' which is the immanent source and essence or Self of all The second most important tenet of the Vedic-Hindu faith is the universe being a moral order, wherein each man gets only what he deserves and every loss incurred is recompensed in the end Hinduism has accepted through the centuries only those beliefs and values which can be reconciled with its own fundamental vision and faith, and has rejected others which are contrary to its basic ethos

Secondly, Hinduism has never been static, except perhaps for a few centuries in the later middle ages It has been constantly changing under the impact of new ideas For example, the ideal of non-violence, imbibed from Buddhism and Jainism, transformed the entire Vedic-Hindu 'religio-culture' and morality Later on Hinduism also welcomed the strict monotheism of Islam and various liberal, humanitarian and positivist ideas of modern Western thought Hinduism has also been changing due

to its own inner dialectics, as also in the process of adapting itself to the changing circumstances

It is impossible to trace the history of Hinduism on a linear chart Hinduism can be better understood on the simile of a huge banyan tree with two trunks and several branches The twin original trunks of Hinduism, the Aryan and the non-Aryan 'religio-cultures', are now lost in the thick jungle, consisting of the various offshoots of the original tree These offshoots or branches are interrelated, in that they have the same source and yet are widely divergent Like the huge banyan tree, Hinduism has included at any point of its history beliefs and practices belonging to quite different ages and expressing quite different stages of religio-spiritual development During any given period, Hinduism has included retrogressive customs and taboos showing signs of decadence and stagnation, as also fresh regenerative ideas which were destined to transform it At a later stage, these new ideas themselves became heavy with the substance of conservatism and reactionary tendencies and were replaced by new and perhaps more refined ideas Sometimes the reactionary forces were so strong that the Hindu society continued for long periods in a state of atavism and degeneration Yet, a closer look would reveal that the seeds of this degeneration were sown much earlier, in perhaps the richest period of Hindu history At the same time, the most decadent stage of Hindu history contained in it seeds of regeneration

There were many attempts at systematization and synthesis of various beliefs and attitudes, but mostly divergent beliefs and attitudes were, and even now are, held without any consciousness of contradiction involved Sometimes new syntheses have been achieved which have replaced old ideas and beliefs, on other occasions old beliefs, practices and attitudes have reasserted themselves The very self-contradictions involved in Hinduism often work as an impetus to the growth of new syntheses of opposite ideas and approaches Thus, Hinduism is constantly changing and renovating itself, without ever losing its identity and unique character The vicissitudes in the Hindu 'religio-culture' have constantly influenced Hindu ethics Hence, the need to study Hindu religio-philosophy for a better understanding of Hindu ethics

Generally, a historical study gives a better perspective to the understanding of a particular subject But it is very difficult to study either Hindu religion or Hindu ethics from a historical point of view Aryans have left very little information regarding the dates of different literary works Then, there is the curious phenomenon of cross references Each single religious text quotes from other texts and is in turn quoted by others, thus making it impossible to estimate the relative dates of their composition Above all, the history of Hindu 'religio-culture' and thought cannot be divided into artificially separated periods with well-defined characteristics Hinduism never discards the old, and the new is not born all of a sudden, but is the result of the development of ideas and tendencies which were present in seed form in the earlier ages For example, Hindu theism, which is understood by Western scholars of such calibre as Ninian Smart to be a later development, has had its origins in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* and *Bhagavadgītā*, and both of them are works of an era before Christ On the other hand, Vedic ritualism is popular even today During any given period, the old and the new have always existed side by side

(iii) We have, therefore, divided Hindu religio-philosophy and morality into several traditions which have run parallel throughout the history of Hinduism and have together constituted the complex whole of Hindu Dharma We will, thus, separately study the ritualistic morality of the Vedic tradition, the socio-centric morality of the Dharmasastras, the liberation-centric morality of the philosophic schools, the theo-centric morality of the devotional sects and the universal morality which is an amalgamation of all the above moralities and is generally propounded in popular Hindu texts

We are aware that such an artificial division of the complex Hindu 'religio-culture' into distinct and supposedly independent traditions fails to do justice to its basic unitary character Various traditions, being distinguished here, have been developed through constant mutual interaction and are often regarded by scholars as complementary to each other Traditionally, every system of philosophy is concerned with some one aspect of life or thought and elaborates upon it, while accepting the reasoning and conclusions of other systems in other fields of thought and practice

Thinkers like Prof K J Shah contend that there are no contradictions, not even vertical divisions, in Hindu thought Various systems of philosophy specialize in their respective fields and together form a homogeneous whole of Hindu religio-philosophy We are not so sure

Moreover, tradition also distinguishes several ways (*mārgas*) which roughly correspond to the three broad divisions of Hindu religio-philosophy and morality suggested by us Though Hinduism expects man strictly to follow his caste profession and generally abide by the customs and norms of the society, it gives him freedom to choose his own way (*mārga*) in his religio-spiritual quest The way here is understood both as a means of the *summum bonum* of human life and as a right integral approach to life, religion and morality Tradition distinguishes three major ways of life (*i*) the way of action (*karma-mārga*) which includes both the ritualistic and socio-moral actions or duties, (*ii*) the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*) which is mainly advocated in the systems of philosophy and generally implies a rejection of the worth of action, and (iii) the way of devotion (*bhakti-mārga*) which expresses a theo-centric world-view and a much more comprehensive and positive approach to religion and morality Sometimes the way of yoga is also listed as an independent way of religious quest But we have included it in the way of knowledge, as yogic concentration has been traditionally accepted as an integral part of the way of knowledge The three major traditions distinguished by us are rough equivalents of the above three ways (*mārgas*) Thus, the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition represents the way of action, the tradition of liberation is essentially the same as the way of knowledge, and the tradition of devotion, of course, is the way of devotion (*bhakti*)

Bhagavadgītā has sought to present a meaningful synthesis of the three ways of action, knowledge and devotion But the three major ways (*mārgas*) have continued to be distinguished in Hindu Dharma The universally accepted doctrine of *adhikāra-bheda* emphasizes the innate differences between men and asserts that different men should pursue different religio-moral ways which suit their respective temperaments and capacities Śamkara is a strong protagonist of this tradition of allotting different ways to different persons according to their natures and capa-

cities He presents a strong argument against the interpretation of *Bhagavadgitā* as supporting the synthesis of the way of action and the way of knowledge According to him, the two ways of action and knowledge are diametrically opposed and are definitely meant for two entirely different temperaments Therefore, they cannot be simultaneously followed by one and the same man [57] This only proves our contention that Hindu Dharma is a complex whole which comprehends several parallel traditions, supporting quite different philosophies and valuational approaches, supposedly meant for men of different capacities and inclinations At the same time, our own division of Hinduism into several parallel traditions is not meant as something final or conclusive, and is to be taken as a working hypothesis which may help us in achieving a better understanding of Hindu religio-philosophy and morality

V Some Religio-metaphysical Presuppositions of Hindu Ethics

Charles A Moore argues for the extreme complexity of Indian mind and civilization and despairs of finding some denominators of mind and practice which may be common to all the religio-philosophical sects and traditions At the same time, he admits the need to search for such common ideas or concepts and himself proceeds to suggest some He feels that it is impossible to understand India and its people (and we may add, their morality) without understanding its basic philosophy, because the intimacy of philosophy and life is so fundamental to the whole Indian point of view [58] Inasmuch as religion and philosophy are so integrally bound together in India, the basic postulates of Indian (Hindu) 'religio-culture' can be termed as religio-metaphysical A cursory glance at these religio-philosophical beliefs will help in a better understanding of Hindu ethics Generally, the immortality of the soul, the law of karma, rebirth or transmigration and liberation (*moksa*) are regarded as the most basic postulates of Indian (Hindu) thought The above postulates present a very ego-centric and incomplete view of Hindu thought Hence to this commonly accepted list we have added polytheism, monism and theism Hindus, like any other people, are interested in their

souls and eschatological destiny, but they are equally interested in the objective world and the Divine reality

(1) Excepting certain Bhakti (devotional) cults which emphasize exclusive devotion to one God, Hindus have been worshipping innumerable deities from the pre-historic Vedic times to this day Though the polytheism of the Vedas is frankly recognized by Indian thinkers, they have either ignored or attempted to rationalize later Hindu polytheism The practice of polytheism is wide-spread and has very important ramifications for Hindu approach to life and morality, and it should therefore be duly recognized The Vedic gods have long been replaced by new Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Rāma, Krsna, Śiva and Śakti or Mother goddess They are generally affirmed to be different concepts or forms of the 'Divine' An average Hindu agrees with the above rationalization at the intellectual level, but treats these gods as different deities at the practical (ritualistic) and emotional levles It is because these deities are conceived in such an elaborate and determinate fashion, with definite abodes, consorts and life histories, that it is difficult to conceive them as different concepts of one and the same God This is especially true of smaller gods like Ganesa, Hanuman and Santosī Matā who are never even referred to as one supreme God The Hindu mind is very much at home with the idea of a plurality of gods (*devatā*) The Vedic sacrifices were directed to different gods A very important *Smārta* sacrifice is addressed to Vaisvadeva (gods of the universe) The Epics and Purānas talk of gods in a very natural and familiar way Even *Bhagavadgitā*, a theistic work, refers to gods "Nourished by sacrifices the gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments you desire "[59] The three famous debts of men are towards the seers, the fathers and the gods Hindus celebrate religious festivals throughout the year and all these festivals are dedicated to different gods All Hindu temples have idols of various gods, and a Hindu while visiting a temple makes it a point to visit and bow down to all these idols If the different deities were merely different conceptions of the same Divinity, there would have been no need to do obeisance before so many gods

The popular Hindu polytheism has very far-reaching implications for Hindu morality On the one hand, it strengthens the

world-and-life-affirmative ethos of the original Aryan tradition, on the other hand, it aligns itself with ritualism and indirectly undermines the ethical point of view

(ii) Strange as it may seem, Hinduism is at once polytheistic, monistic and theistic According to it, a monistic world-view refers primarily to the ultimate truth of one all-comprehending Reality, but it does not deny the existence of various gods who derive their being from the 'One', as does the rest of the world A much quoted verse of *Rg Veda* declares "The Real (*Sat*) is one, the learned call it by many names "[60] The Upanisads have presented a moistic world-view which has been imbibed by Hinduism so thoroughly that it has become the constant frame of reference of all Hindu thinking and practice According to it, every thing, every being 'is' in some way the one *Ātman-Brahman*, not in any pantheistic sense, but in the Vedantic sense of the 'One' being the source, stay and end of all that there is The famous Upanisadic text, "All this is *Brahman*", contains the further phrase, "all this comes out of, is sustained by and merges into *Brahman* "[61] The ultimate Reality (*Sat* or *Brahman*) is the very essence of the universe, as well as the Self of man [62]

This vision of one Self in all should have led the Aryans to a morality of love and compassion for all, but it did not The transcendentalism inherent in the Vedantic mysticism, instead, led the ancients to the exaltation of the creed of renunciation and its related virtues of detachment etc

(iii) Characteristically, Hindu theism finds no difficulty in reconciling itself either with popular polytheism or with Vedantic monism The existence of smaller gods is accepted alongwith one supreme God who is conceived in terms of the Vedantic Absolute

Though the Upanisads are largely monistic in their world-view, there are theistic under-currents in several Upanisads The Upanisadic Absolute is also the Creator and Governor of the world But it was in *Bhagavadgītā* that Hindu theism was properly developed In a typically theistic terminology *Bhagavadgītā* affirms the transcendence of God to the world and the soul, as also the numinous character of God [63] Like any other theistic text, *Bhagavadgītā* also affirms God's personal Being, and regards the soul as a part of Him (and not as identical with Him) [64] And yet,

the Lord of The *Bhagavadgītā* is essentially the same as the Vedantic Absolute His transcendence is not the transcendence of a wholly-other Deity, but that of an all-comprehending Absolute He is the Self residing in all living beings and controlling them from within [65] The theism of the *Bhagavadgītā* is further developed in several Puranas, Bhakti-sūtras, and the writings of Vedantic teachers and saints belonging to various devotional sects The advent of devotional theism in the last centuries before Christ transformed Hindu ethics While the Vedic ritualism is practical and harsh, and Vedantic monism is intellectual and dry, devotional theism encourages gentle emotions, including love and compassion for all

(iv) If we were to search for the one most widely shared belief of the Hindus, then it would be their belief in the world order being a moral order which is oriented towards the realization and conservation of moral and spiritual values It is the belief that the moral law, and not the mechanical forces of nature, governs and controls the world order and all natural processes It is also the belief in the final victory of justice, better known as truth (*satya*) or right (*dharma*) This belief implies a pious faith that every evil is punished, every virtue rewarded and every suffering compensated in the end It gives meaning to moral responsibility and a motive for moral conduct, for according to it, as you sow, so shall you reap, that is, each person is allotted the lot which he has earned for himself

This idea of the world being a moral order was first formulated in the Vedas as *rta* *Rta* is the immanent moral order of the universe that governs and controls all phenomena from within [66] It was also believed that the correct performance of the Vedic rituals leads to an automatic realization of one's desires The fulfilment of a desire was supposed to materialize through the agency of *apūrva*, the unseen potency generated by the performance of a sacrifice All these beliefs must have contributed to the development of the theory of karma The Upanisads affirm both karma and transmigratory existence,[67] but fail to relate the two ideas properly There seems to be some confusion in the minds of the Upanisadic seers regarding the mode of recompense for one's actions after death The *Chāndogya Upanisad* posits a double recompense,[68] first in the other world and then

again in the next birth. Probably rewards and punishments in the next world and recompense for one's actions in the next life on earth were two independent ideas which were developed in two entirely different traditions, and which have been juxtaposed in the idea of double recompense.

Our actions are further supposed to determine both, our nature or character, as also all the external circumstances of our life, the kind of birth we get, the sufferings and joys we undergo and so on.[69] Nothing happens without a cause and the cause here is to be evaluated in ethical terms. That is to say, the moral quality of our deeds, thoughts and desires not only conditions our future character, but also manipulates the natural world order, so that we are thrown into external circumstances that are most suited to materialize or effect the kind of rewards and punishments which our moral character deserves. The law of karma is thus an explanatory hypothesis, meant to explain and rationally justify the inequalities found in men's characters, capacities and circumstances. This hypothesis has very far-reaching ramifications for Hindu morality. On the one hand, it provides an excellent motive for righteous conduct. Man should act righteously in his own interest, as it is ensured by the world's moral order that every evil action would sooner or later come back to the evil doer and make him miserable. It teaches man to be honest and assume the responsibility or accountability for his deeds, as also to be content and at peace with himself. On the other hand, the law of karma is an extremely individualistic hypothesis which encourages man to be self-centred and indifferent towards others, since the misfortunes of others are easily explained as the results of their own past *karmas*, and hence what they themselves deserve. It is also repeatedly affirmed that each man must suffer the good or bad fruits of his actions and that no one else can suffer for him or help him truly.[70]

The law of karma does not fit very well in the original Aryan ethos. While the universally practised Hindu custom of obsequial rites presupposes that the rites performed by one's progeny ensure one's well-being in the other world,[71] the law of karma categorically affirms that no one else's action can ever help a man. The belief in and the practice of obsequial rites are an integral part of the Vedic tradition, whereas the law of karma seems to express

an entirely different and extremely individualistic approach to social life and morality But characteristically, Hindus accept both beliefs in full faith and even act accordingly

(v) Another very important postulate of Hindu morality is the immortality of the soul and transmigratory existence The Upanisads have given two types of description of the self (*ātman*), one as the eternal, immutable, unattached and transcendent Pure-consciousness,[72] and the other as the transmigrating soul which wanders from one existence to another due to its desires and actions [73] Now, transmigratory existence necessarily presupposes separate individual souls which undergo different experiences in innumerable births, and the immutable, transcendent Vedāntic *Ātman* which is the same in all can hardly be conceived as undergoing transmigratory existence Yet all the Vedantic texts seem to think that both concepts refer to the same self The use of the one word *ātman* for both, the transmigrating individual self and the transcendent universal Self, probably led to this confusion in the Vedantic approach The entire doctrine of karma and transmigratory existence seems to have borrowed heavily from the Sāmkhya dualism and generally consists of the following

1 The plurality of souls,
2 The distinction of the soul from the body,
3 The immortality of the soul and its transmigratory existence,
4 The soul's being a pure detached consciousness and a non-agent, and
5 The soul's transmigration being in accordance with the *karmas* of its body-mind complex with which it has become associated due to the ignorance of its true nature

A theistic version of the above doctrine of transmigratory existence is presented best in the *Bhagavadgītā* which compares the rebirth of the soul in another body to changing of clothes, thereby emphasizing the essential distinction between the soul and the body-mind complex [74] This is quite a complex doctrine which suffers from certain philosophical inconsistencies, and is open to certain criticisms We cannot discuss them here for lack of space Though philosophically it may not be very defensible, as a metaphysical presupposition of morality it is no less

meaningful than Kant's affirmation of the immortality of the soul It teaches man to look beyond the present moment and conduct himself, so as to ensure a better and worthier future for himself

(vi) In no other aspect of the Hindu religio-philosophy is the contrast between the two traditions of Hindu 'religio-culture' more prominent than in the concept of the eschatological destiny of the soul Not only do the Dharmasastras and Purānas uniformly uphold heaven as the eschatological goal of the righteous soul, it is harmoniously related to the first three goals of life (*trivarga*), affirmed by the first or Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition On the other extreme is the goal of *moksa* (liberation), or freedom from and transcendence of the world and all its distinctions and limitations The Vedantic *moksa* even transcends the limitations of the personality, in that the individual soul which is essentially identical with the supreme Self is merged into the latter in the state of liberation [75]

Gradually an entirely different concept of liberation emerged Its chief protagonist was Samkhya, though it came to be shared by almost all the orthodox schools of philosophy, except Vedanta, as also by all the popular religious texts This second concept implies separate individual souls, transmigratory existence and the transcendent pure nature of the soul It also affirms that the soul's sojourn in the world is full of suffering and is of the nature of bondage Soul's liberation, therefore, consists in soul's freedom from transmigratory existence and realization of its original pure nature (*kaivalya*) This concept of liberation is rather self-centric and is quite different from that of Vedanta The ideas of the soul's ultimate aloneness and the miserable nature of the transmigratory existence were unknown in the Vedic-Vedantic tradition

The two concepts of *moksa* slowly got merged, so that the Vedantic writers started explaining liberation in self-centric terms With the recognition of liberation as the ultimate goal of human life and its conception in self-centric terms, an extremely individualistic approach to morality was engendered which was not intended by the seers of the Upanisads

VI Morality as Dharma

While the compound word Hindu Dharma means the entire 'religio-culture' of Hinduism, *dharma* as such is almost coextensive with morality. The concept of *dharma* is the most basic and comprehensive and at the same time the most loosely used concept of Hindu thought. It is vital, therefore, to understand this concept before we even attempt to understand Hindu morality. In the Vedas *dharma*, like *rta*, is given a near-ontological status. Both are equated to *satya* (truth) and truth is what eternally is. They are also opposed to *anrta* (falsehood) and false is both ontologically less real and morally reprehensible. *Rta* or *dharma* signifies the moral order of the universe that governs and determines the course of events, so as to ensure that truth or *dharma* is always victorious and that untruth or *adharma* (morally wrong or unjust) is finally defeated.[76] In the famous passage of the *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad*, *dharma* is hailed as the highest truth and power, "so that even a weak man hopes to defeat a strong man through *dharma*."[77] It means that the world is a moral order wherein natural events are regulated by moral necessity.

Dharma is mostly understood in Vedas and Dharmasastras as the performance of Vedic sacrifices and other rituals, or the merit resulting therefrom. Mīmāmsa defines *dharma* as what is enjoined in the Vedas,[78] which assertion seems to reduce *dharma* to Vedic rituals. These Vedic rituals are usually divided into three classes, i.e. desire-prompted ones (*kāmya karma*), daily obligatory ones (*nitya karma*) and those which must be performed on specified occasions (*naimittika karma*). Excepting the first, the remaining two categories of Vedic-Dharmasāstric rituals are to be performed as ends-in-themselves. Though conceived in a purely ritualistic context, *dharma* here is to be understood as duty *par excellence* and appears to be a deontological concept. Specially, Prabhakara school of Mimamsa has unequivocally emphasized that (ritualistic) duties ought to be performed solely because they are perceived to be one's duty, and not for the sake of any desire for their fruits.

But the majority of Hindu thinkers have shown an ambivalent attitude towards the problem of the relation between duty and desire for results. *Dharma* is frequently asserted to be a means of

achieving either heaven or a better birth in the next life, or even prosperity here and now [79] The *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* frankly defines *dharma* as "that from which (results) the accomplishment of exaltation (*abhyudaya*) and of the supreme goal (*niḥśreyasa*) "[80] This view of *dharma* or morality is apparently influenced by the traditional equation between moral and ritualistic duties (which are mostly undertaken with specific desires)

With the development of the moral consciousness of the Aryans, it was felt that the real worth of *dharma* or righteousness lies, not in the outer act, but in the inner attitude or spirit of the performer According to Āpastamba the ritualistic and socio-moral duties should be performed for their own sake, and if their performance happens to bring some good fruits, the latter should be taken as additional (and not as the main motive for the discharge of one's duties) [81]

Like the Dharmasastras, the *Bhagavadgītā* does not reject the ritualistic concept of *dharma* But its own understanding of *dharma* is in terms of socio-moral duties or *varnāśrama dharma* The *Gītā* further asserts that the various socio-moral duties should be performed without any desire for their fruits and even without any ego of being the agent thereof [82] The *Bhagavadgītā's* ideal of desireless action comes very close to the Kantian concept of duty for duty's sake In fact, it is only in the *Gītā* that the concept of *dharma* acquires a truly moral meaning and content (We shall have occasion to study the *Gītā's* ideal in our chapter VI *infra*)

The concept of *dharma* has been further enlarged by its association with the concept of debt (*rna*) A man is supposed to be born with certain debts to parents, seers and gods, and that way of life is *dharma* which helps man discharge his debts to all of them [83] Gradually the concept of *dharma* has acquired a truly moral meaning as righteous conduct in the society According to the *Mahābhārata*, "*Dharma* has no limits It extends to all spheres It is what sustains the world" [84] It means that *dharma* or righteousness is socially oriented, that is, it largely consists in social morality Since the aim of *dharma* is to preserve the social order, *dharma* has been generally understood as duties according to one's caste and stage of life (*varnāśrama-dharma*) It is in this sense that the term *dharma* is mostly used by the Hindu religious texts The *Bhagavadgītā* has presented a very strong case for the performance of one's

duties (*sva-dharma*) But unfortunately it has consistently understood man's duties in terms of his class or caste (*varna*)[85] The ancient texts, thus, often confused man's *dharma* with his externally imposed profession The referent of the concept of *dharma* was mostly the class (*varna*) and not the individual One's *varna* decided not only one's socio-moral duties, but also the spirituo-moral virtues one was expected to practise While brahmanas were expected to practise calmness, fortitude and forgiveness, ksatriyas were asked to practise a very different set of manly virtues Sadly enough, the *dharma* of the 'lower' classes consisted exclusively in the performance of their class duties, and hardly any moral virtues were expected from them [86]

Dharma also means the moral law within man, so that acting according to *dharma* would mean acting in accordance with one's spiritual nature It was naively believed by the ancient Hindus that duties in accordance with one's caste and stage of life are also in accordance with one's inclinations or character, and hence performance of one's caste duties (*sva-dharma*) leads to self-fulfilment [87] Prasastapāda defines *dharma* (virtue) as a quality of the self which is generated by 'means of pure thoughts and determinations ' But then he goes on to explain *dharma* or righteousness in terms of acting according to one's ordained duties [88] It is in this mixed up comprehensive sense that most of the religious texts, including the *Bhagavadgitā*, use the word *dharma*

The Hindu concept of *dharma* has thus often been vitiated by its very close association with both ritualistic and caste-ordained duties, so that the purely moral sense of duty is overshadowed by these ideas Hindu thinkers also appreciate and recommend the practice of moral virtues and moral norms which apply to man as man and are called *sādhārana dharma* or universal duties But there has been no attempt to systematically relate the two classes of *dharma* or duty, i e those based on class distinctions and those applicable to all men

Above all, *dharma* is a very comprehensive concept which makes it almost coextensive with entire morality When we say, *ahimsā paramo dharmah*', we mean that it is the highest duty and the highest virtue which should be followed in practice and realized in one's character Moral virtue finds its true meaning when it is translated in external acts or duty, and duty becomes morally

relevant only when it is performed in a virtuous frame of mind The concept of *dharma* comprehends both concepts of duty and virtue, and becomes a very profound and far-reaching concept of moral thought A man's *dharma* includes all the duties he ought to perform and all the virtues he ought to practise, that is, *dharma* comprehends all one ought to do and all one ought to be It also includes all his relative (*varnāśrama*) and unconditional (*sādhāraṇa*) duties As ritualistic duty, *dharma* is what is commanded by an external authority (Vedas) At the same time, *dharma* or moral law is innate in man, and by performing one's duties man fulfils his own inner being[89] Thus, almost everything we can discuss in ethics is included in one way or the other in the concept of *dharma*

NOTES

1 *S Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1958), p 80, cf "To see the truth deeply is to believe in it fully, to believe intensely is to be or become So philosophy is transformed naturally into religion and morality In India philosophy has seldom dwelt apart from religion All intellectual speculation had an important bearing on actual life " Surama Dasgupta, *Development of Moral Philosophy in India* (1961), p 5

2 *The Fundamentals of Hinduism* (1971), p 11

3 *Matthew* 22 21

4 *Hinduism* (197?), pp 12 13

5 See *The Cultural Heritage of India* (1975), vol I, pp 76 ff References to various tribes are scattered all through the two Epics and Puranas Also see *M S* X 44

6 *Ramayana, Kishkindha Kanda*, ch XXVII, *Sundara Kanda*, chs IV to VII

7 *M S* III 12 ff, IX 138 ff etc

8 *History* (1974), vol II, pp 25 ff

9 *Gaut D S* X 61-62

10 *Hindu Intellectual Tradition* (1979), pp 95-96

11 *Gaut D S* X 67

12 See M Monier Williams, op cit (1974), pp 52, 84 85 and H Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (1969), pp 306 ff, 314 ff, 406 ff, 595 ff

13 *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems* (1965), pp 9 ff, 35 ff, 103, 106, 114-115

14 Op cit (1961), p 10

15 *Foundation of Indian Culture* (1984), vol I, *Spiritual Vision and Symbolic Forms in Ancient India*, pp 60, 71-72 cf 'Throughout the known history of India these two points of view have operated in a dialectical process of antagonistic co-

operation to bring to pass the majestic evolution of (that) which we know today as the miracle of Indian civilization " H Zimmer, op cit , p 539

16 See *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol I, pp 80 ff

17 See G C Pande, op cit , vol II, *Dimensions of Indian Social History* (1984), pp 210 ff

18 N V Banerjee, *The Spirit of Indian Philosophy* (1974), p 291

19 M Monier Williams, op cit (1974), pp 84-85, 168-169, 184 ff , Maurice Phillips, *The Teaching of the Vedas* (1978), pp 226 ff

20 See N K Devaraja, *The Mind and Spirit of India* (1967), pp 39, 81 ff , 96 ff , 107 ff and K Satchidananda Murty, *The Indian Spirit* (1965), pp 8 ff , 82 ff , 87

21 *Īsa Up* 1-2, *Taittiriya Up* I 4 3

22 *M S* II 224, *Mbh San P* VII 17, XII 17, CLXI 2 ff etc —Note We have used the Hindi transl of the *Mahabharata*, edited by Damodar Satavalekar (1968) which is based on the original Sanskrit edition of the Bhandarkar Research Institute, Poona

23 *M S* IV 137

24 *Yajñ S* I 291

25 *Mbh Udyoga Parva* LXX 18 ff , *Śan P* VIII 6 ff , XV 48, XVIII 22-23 etc

26 *M S* III 75 ff , *Mbh San P* XI 15 ff

27 *Mbh Āran P* XXXII 47, 54, cf ibid XXXII 11 ff, 39 ff, 54

28 Ibid, *Āran P* CIC 3 ff, 19 ff , *San P* XV 20 ff

29 *B G* II 11-13, cf *Mbh San P* XIII 6, XV 56

30 *B G* II 32-33, 37

31 *M S* VII 14 ff , VIII 124 ff, 306, *Mbh San P* XIV 14 ff , XV 2 ff

32 "Assemble together, speak with one voice, let your mind be of one accord, united be the thoughts of all, that all may live happily " *Rg Veda* X 192 2-4 quoted in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol I, p 198

33 "Every Aryan is born with a three-fold obligation first to the gods which he discharges by sacrifices, second to *rsis* which he should discharge by studying Vedas and third to his ancestors which he should discharge by getting sons " *Taittiriya Samhita* VI 3 10 5, quoted in M Hiriyanna, *Indian Conception of Values* (1975), p 151

34 Quoted in ibid, p 199

35 *Mundaka Up* I 2 7 ff

36 See *Katha Up* 1 2 23-24, I 3 4-9, *Taittiriya Up* I 11 1, *Mundaka Up* III 1 5, *S B Br S* I 1 1, *M S* II 97, 118

37 *Chan Up* VI 1 4 6, VI 7 7, *Taittiriya Up* III 1 1 *Brhad Up* III 7 3 ff etc

38 *Brhad Up* III 2 13

39 *Mbh San P* , chs VII to XXV, XXXIV, LVII, LXVI to LXVIII

40 *B G* II 37, *Mbh Āran P* XXXII 22, *San P* XXVI 34, *Svargarohana Parva*, ch III, *Āpast D S* II 7 16 1, II 9 24 5 etc

41 *M S* VI 35, *Mbh Śan P* XXV 6, CCLXI 15 etc

42 *Chan Up* II 23 1, *S B* , *Br S* I 1 4, *S B* , *B G* , introd to ch III etc

43 *M S* V 22 ff, 31, 39, 44

44 *Mbh Śan P* CCLV 24 ff, CCLVII 4 ff CCLXI 19, CCLXIV 17 etc.

45 Ibıd, *Śān P* CCXXXVII 17 ff, CCLXIV 19 ff, *Anuś P* CXVI 72, CXVII 37-39

46 *B G* III 8 ff, 19 ff, 35, XVIII 5-9, 45

47 Ibıd, II 13, 22

48 Ibıd, II 18 ff, III 27 ff

49 Ibıd, II 38, IV 22-23, IX-27

50 *Selectıons from Swamı Vıvekananda* (1957), pp 178 ff, 243 ff

51 Ibıd, pp, 39 ff, 280 ff

52 *A Crıtıcal Study of Hınduısm* (1970), p 97 Interestıngly, M Monıer Wıllıams had earlıer used almost ıdentıcal words to express the Hındu wıllıngness to worshıp each and every thıng as dıvıne, but he understands thıs practıce ın terms of aborıgınal fetıshısm and Brahmanıcal pantheısm, and both these terms are used by hım ın a derogatory sense See op cıt (1977), pp 168-169

53 Op cıt (1957), pp 185 ff, cf Srı Aurobındo, *The Foundatıons of Indıan Culture* (1968), pp 134 ff, 172 ff

54 *Ś B*, *Br S* II 1 14, *Ś B*, *Chan Up* VI 2 1-3, *S B*, *Brhad Up* I 4 10, III 5 1

55 *Ś B*, *Br S*, ıntrod, I 1 4

56 Ibıd, I 3 34

57 *Ś B*, *B G* ıntrod to ch III, III 4, 16, IV 18-19, ıntrod to ch V etc

58 Charles A Moore, ed, *The Indıan Mınd* (1967), pp 1, 4

59 *B G* III 11-12

60 *Rg Veda* I 164 46

61 *Chan Up* III 14 1, cf *Bṛhad Up* II 1 20, II 4 6, *Taıttırıya Up* II 5 1; III 1 1

62 *Chan Up* VI 8 4-7, *Brhad Up* III 7 3 ff

63 *B G* VII 12-13, 24-25, X 41-42, XI 15 ff

64 Ibıd, XV 7

65 Ibıd, IX 17-18, X 20, XVIII 61

66 *Rg Veda* I 24 8, IV 23 9, quoted ın S Radhakrıshnan, *Indıan Phılosophy* (1956), vol I p 79

67 *Brhad Up* III 2 13, IV 4 5, IV 3 35 ff

68 *Chan Up* V 10 1-8, cf *Brhad Up* IV 4 6

69 *M S* XII 52ff, especıally 81, *Mbh Śan P* CLXXIV 8 ff, CCLXXXVII 28, 43 etc

70 *M S* IV 239, XII 18 ff, *Mbh San P* CCLXXIX 21, CCLXXXVII 37 etc Also see G C Pande, op cıt (1982), vol I, pp 64 ff

71 *M S* III 274-275, IX 138

72 *Brhad Up* III 4 1—III 5 1, IV 2 4, IV 3 15

73 Ibıd, IV 3 35 ff, IV 4 6

74 *B G* II 13, 18 ff

75 *Mundaka Up* III 2 8-9, *Brhad Up* II 4 12

76 *M S* VIII 15 17, *Mbh Śan P* XCIII 6, XCVI, 16-19

77 *Brhad Up* I 4 14

78 *Mımamsa Sūtra* I 1 2

79 *Āpast D S* II 2 4 9, II 5 11 10-11
80 *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* I 1 2
81 *Āpast D S* I 7 20 1-3
82 *B G* II 47, III 7, 19, 25-30, IV 22 etc
83 M Hiriyanna, op cit (1976), pp 150-152
84 *Mbh Śān P* CX 11, cf ibid XCI 5-14
85 *B G* III 35, XVIII 47-48, cf *M S* X 96-97
86 *B G* IV 13, XVIII 41-46, *M S* I 87-91
87 *B G* III 5, 33, 35
88 Prasastapada, *Padarthadharma Samgraha,* as quoted in Cromwell Crawford, *Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals* (1974), p 141
89 *B G* XVIII 45

CHAPTER II

RITUAL-CENTRIC MORALITY OF THE VEDIC-DHARMAŚĀSTRIC TRADITION

I Amoral Nature of the Brāhmanic Rituals

Karma-kānda or the way of rituals is the oldest of the several parallel traditions constituting Hinduism It had its origins in the Vedas around 2000 B C and was developed in an extreme form in Brāhmanas which were probably compiled around 1000 B C The Vedic ritualism continued to be a dominant trend in the Dharmasāstras which were written approximately during the period between 3rd century B C to around 3rd century A D Rituals did not form the chief concern of the Epics which were probably written and finalized during the same period as the Dharmasastras and Purānas which came much later But even they advocated Vedic and other rituals in the characteristic spirit of the Vedic tradition

(1) During the Vedic period *yajña* (sacrifice) was the pivot round which the entire Aryan 'religio-culture' was evolved In the beginning, these sacrifices were relatively simple affairs and expressed the religious piety of the early Aryans The sacrifice was originally conceived as a literal offering of nourishment to the gods who were then expected to shower prosperity and other desired gifts on the sacrificer For the simple Aryans prosperity, moral purity and religious piety were not disparate values, rather, they were seen as necessary ingredients of a desirable life Vedic rituals were understood and practised as a means, as well as an integral part, of a worthy life Thus, many of the Vedic sacrifices, especially the daily rituals, were performed as symbolic acts expressing harmony or rapport with the forces of nature, without any desire for their fruits Ritualistic and moral purity was regarded as a necessary pre-requisite of the performance of such sacrifices There were detailed instructions concerning the norms of purity to be observed by the performer before and

during the sacrifice While harmony with nature could supposedly be achieved through Vedic rituals, it was felt that harmony within the human society is best achieved through the practice of such moral virtues as friendliness, magnanimity etc Truthfulness is another virtue greatly admired by the Vedic Aryans

Certain Western writers idealize Vedic religion as an expression of genuine religious piety, and even present it as a monotheistic religion, which it is not They underplay its polytheism and ritualism and over-emphasize those passages of the Vedas which express a relatively high level of moral consciousness and religious piety [1] But this form of selective presentation never does justice to the subject If we try to understand the early Vedic religion comprehensively, we would find it to be an expression of simple religious piety which was necessarily developed in a ritualistic-polytheistic context

(ii) Vedic sacrifices became progressively more elaborate with a concomitant decrease in their religio-moral content in the Brahmanas V M Apte observes

"So implicit was the belief of the ancient Aryans in the efficacy of their rituals which practically dominated every phase of their life, and so firm their faith in almost unlimited powers of the rituals in ensuring prosperity and averting misfortunes, that quite a number of interesting ritual practices and performances were formulated for this purpose "[2]

Every stage of life from birth (or rather existence in the womb) to death was marked by a corresponding sacrament In addition, there were rituals for the attainment of specific wishes and averting misfortunes There were rites for prosperity in trade or victory in dispute, rites for procuring gold and other objects or finding lost property, as also those for guarding one's wife's fidelity ' There were specific instructions in the Brāhmanas regarding the details of each and every aspect of various sacrifices, such as the construction of the altar, preparation and lighting of various fires, the manner of grinding *soma* leaves and the utensils to be used etc The main sacrifice apart, even the erection of the altar became a very elaborate affair requiring specific number of muds and metals which were to be spread in various specified layers, and so on [3] There were also detailed instructions regard-

ing the ending of the sacrifice and the disposal of the material used in it [4] Both the grandeur and the degeneration of the Vedic rituals are best exemplified in the major Vedic (*Śrauta*) sacrifices, such as *Agnistoma*, *Aśvamedha*, *Darśapūrnamāsa* etc All of these sacrifices were real elaborate affairs requiring a lot of preparation and expenditure, as well as time Most of these sacrifices took several days to complete, and some stretched to a whole year, or even continued for an indefinite number of years !

Gradually the violence in these sacrifices increased Scores and probably hundreds of animals were sacrificed in the major sacrifices Cow, the most sacred animal of the present-day Hinduism, was one of the important victims in several Vedic sacrifices Even man was included among the list of victims of some sacrifices, such as *Sarvamedha* (sacrifice of all) An important Vedic ritual—*Agnicayana* (erection of the fire altar) included man as one of the five victims whose heads were to be walled up in the construction of the altar Thus, the human sacrifice was not beyond the thinking of the Aryans, though in all probability it was usually not carried out [5]

The role of the priests became more and more important and the number of priests required in a sacrifice multiplied, till sixteen or more priests were required for the bigger sacrifices Every priest had a very specialized function to perform in the sacrifice, and priesthood became hereditary Significantly, the host (*yajamāna*) had no role to play in the sacrifice, even though he was the one who was expected to reap the fruits of the sacrifice by virtue of having paid for the expenses of the sacrifice and large fees to the brāhmana priests The host was thus expected to reap the fruits of actions performed by others (priests)

A Vedic sacrifice, if correctly performed, was supposed to automatically effect the realization of the desires of the subject or the host The Brahmanas affirmed the self-efficacy of the Vedic rituals, and there is a suggestion in them that gods, religious piety and morality are secondary in the successful performance of Vedic sacrifices Prof P V Kane has quoted the *Mimāmsā Sūtra*[6] to the effect that in the Vedic sacrifices it is the oblation into fire (*havi*) which is principal, while gods (*devatā*) are secondary Fruits of Vedic sacrifices (*phala*) are conferred by the sacrifices and not by the deity, and the words, that 'Indra and Agni confer

progeny to the sacrificer', are purely laudatory That is to say, gods are mere accompaniments of rituals and the rituals alone directly effect the desired results (*phala*)

V M Apte has pointed out certain magical elements in the Vedic rituals [7] For example, in the *Śyena* sacrifice, aiming at the destruction of the enemy, the priests wore red garments and the sacrificial butter was made of the milk of a sick cow ! Slightest error in the ritualistic details was supposed to be disastrous The Brahmanas abound in examples of men losing their limbs or life due to some ritualistic error As Cromwell Crawford says,

"The error and its punishment were not related to any moral aspects of sacrifice, but to its magical and mechanical sides "[8]

Moral qualifications were generally not needed for the efficacy of these sacrifices, as affirmed in the following passage of the *Aitareya Brāhmana*

"Even if the performing priest is not a brahmana (in the strict sense), or even if he is pronounced to be an ill-reputed man, the sacrifice nevertheless goes up to gods and becomes not polluted by its contagion with a wicked man "[9]

The moral character of the performer of the sacrifice was hardly ever considered as a relevant qualification, the only requirement being ritualistic purity Similarly, the rightness or wrongness of the purpose of the sacrifice was usually considered irrelevant for its successful performance Sacrifices were performed for all sorts of immoral purposes, including the destruction of the enemy which was the professed aim of the *Śyena* sacrifice Cromwell Crawford is right when he remarks that Vedic rituals were quite frequently used for immoral purposes, and no stigma was attached to such practices The following passage of the *Aitareya Brāhmana* seems to prove his observation

"Should a *hotr* (priest) wish to deprive any sacrificer of his standing place, then he must not repeat the 'silent prayer' at his sacrifice, the sacrificer then perishes along with his sacrifice which thus has become rootless" [10]

The Grhya Sūtras which followed the *Brāhmanas* prescribed their own rituals, called *Grhya* (domestic) sacrifices Some of these sacrifices (five daily sacrifices and morning and evening prayers) were to be performed daily, while others were meant for special occasions Both groups of sacrifices were obligatory on the householders

of the three 'upper' classes The daily domestic sacrifices of Grhya Sūtras were relatively simple rituals They expressed a certain amount of religious piety and a desire to establish harmonious relations with the universe which characterized the early Vedic religion At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the Grhya Sūtras accepted and endorsed all major Vedic (*Śrauta*) sacrifices and whatever else they implied [11]

(iii) The Dharmasastras are the main source books of present-day Hindu Dharma Though Hinduism originated in the Vedas, it is the later texts, specially the Dharmasastras, which have provided it with its most important religious beliefs and practices.

Dharmasāstras accepted Vedic rituals, but often simplified them They also developed rituals of their own The most important group of rituals advocated unanimously by the Dharmasastras, is that of *Pañca-mahāyajñas* (five great sacrifices) which are to be performed daily by all the householders of three 'upper' classes They consist of *Brahmayajña* (regular study of the Vedas), *Pitryajña* or *tarpana* (offering water to the forefathers), *Devayajña* or *homa* (oblations into fire with recitation of *mantras*), *Bhūtayajña* or *Balivaisvadeva* (offering food to fire, water and other natural forces or nature deities, as well as to all living creatures) and *Manusyayajña* (giving food to the guests) [12] Now, the study of Vedas may have religious worth, but it is mainly conceived and practised as a daily ritual The next two sacrifices of offering water to the forefathers and oblations into the fire are nothing but rituals to be performed more or less mechanically The fourth or *Balivaiśvadeva* sacrifice is more important and is also recognized as an independent ritual The sacrifice consists of offering food in the fire for various gods, after which some of it is to be thrown into different directions for various smaller deities and living beings And the remaining portion is to be left on the ground outside the house 'for persons suffering from sin-originated diseases, outcastes, dogs, crows and worms '[13] Apart from the unthinkable indignity associated with such food left on the ground, the intention here is obviously not to feed human beings, but to fulfil a ritualistic obligation Even in modern times, though very few men perform all the five sacrifices, many householders of 'upper' castes do take out a microscopic quantity of food out of their plate and put it on the ground for different living beings !

The last sacrifice of feeding the guest also had ritualistic overtones, but gradually developed into an independent practice with socio-moral significance It would be discussed in our next chapter

Another related and very important ritual of the Dharmasastras is *srāddha* (obsequial rites) *Śrāddha* consists of feeding brahmanas with the specific aim of giving satisfaction to the forefathers The ancestors are said to eagerly wait for dutiful sons and grandsons who would perform their obsequial rites and thereby secure a long stay in heaven for them [14] Dharmasastras give detailed instructions regarding the brahmanas to be called for the feeding, the manner of welcoming and serving the brahmanas and the food to be offered to them The food eaten by the brahmanas is supposed to reach the ancestors in some literal sense Various Law-givers, as Manu and Āpastamba, have given the relative efficacy of various kinds of food to be offered in a *śrāddha* Thus, if sesame seeds, rice, barley and fruits are offered (to the forefathers through the mouths of the brahmanas), the forefathers are supposedly satisfied for a month, if fish is offered, they are satisfied for two months, if meat of red he-goat is offered, their satisfaction continues for ever ![15]

It is believed that if the funeral rites are not properly performed, the departed soul becomes a ghost (*preta*) Therefore, there is tremendous religio-social pressure on sons and relatives to perform the rites in an elaborate fashion, which leaves a majority of them under heavy debts The belief in funeral rites means that the rites performed by one's heirs can secure one's eschatological destiny As we know, the Vedic ritualistic tradition emphasized the ritualistic act more than the inner spirit, and asserted that it is possible for the host to reap the fruits of the sacrifice performed by the priests That is how the funeral rites, even though they are a later innovation, are harmoniously related to the Vedic religion

Often irrational sanctions and comparisons were offered to ensure that people performed various rituals For example, Manu equated the non-performance of *Agnihotra* sacrifice to the murder of a son and prescribed a rigorous penance for the lapse [16] Everywhere in this tradition the emphasis was on the performance of outward act and not on the inner spirit Too much attention was

bestowed on ritualistic cleanliness (*śauca*) and uncleanliness (*aśauca*) There were innumerable taboos regarding ritualistic defilement, resulting from the death of someone or the birth of a child A man was supposed to become impure by touching or even talking to an outcaste, a dog and a woman under certain natural conditions, such as child birth or menstruation He also became impure if a death occurred in the family [17] While bathing or merely rinsing the mouth with water purified a man in certain cases of defilement, in other cases detailed ritualistic baths were prescribed at the end of specified periods of defilement (*aśauca*) Many of these ritualistic observances are still practised by the caste Hindus

Another subject that seems to have engrossed our Law-givers (*Smrtikāras*) is food They have given elaborate and irrational instructions regarding the eatability or otherwise of various kinds of food Not only was the food spoilt by dirty objects or animals thought to be unfit for human consumption, but the food which was touched or even looked at by an untouchable or a sinful person was declared to be uneatable [18] Though meat as such was not prohibited, the meat of certain animals and birds was so, as also certain innocent things like garlic [19] And reading these lists one cannot detect a single reason for the choice of various taboos

Smrtis abound in innumerable other taboos which could hardly be given any rational explanation A graduate householder was enjoined by Manu that he should not see the sun or its reflection in water, or his own reflection in water, he should not cross over the rope binding a calf, nor should he write on the ground, or grind a lump of mud with his hands, he should also not point out a rainbow to others, and should cross a mud-heap, a brāhmana and certain trees in a prescribed manner [20] Now, most of these taboos are irrational and amoral, and must have, therefore, encouraged an equally irrational and amoral approach to life and morality The Dharmasastras were supposed to regulate the entire life of man, and if they chose to prescribe the above amoral taboos, instead of giving meaningful moral commands and prohibitions, it may suggest that these ritualistic concerns were more important for them than moral ones More-over, if so much time and thought were devoted to such irrational

matters, naturally much less time and thought would have been spared for moral concerns

(iv) Though the main stance of the Epics and the Puranas was not ritualistic, the rituals found an important place in their total concept of the right way of life The two Epics and scores of major and minor Puranas cover almost one and a half millenniums of Hindu history So much changed during this period Vedic sacrifices became increasingly less popular, first, because they involved so much violence which had gradually become abhorrent to the Hindu mind, and secondly, because they necessitated huge expenditure and were restricted to the three 'upper' castes, thus being beyond the reach of the masses The *Mahābhārata* and Purānas frankly admitted that the poor and the lowly were offered no religious solace by the Vedic tradition They were also conscious of the attraction of the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism for such people The Puranic writers, therefore, set upon the task of wooing the 'lower' castes, the poor, the illiterate and women away from the lure of Buddhism by providing them with an alternative religion This new religion mainly consists of various ritualistic fasts or vows (*vratas*) and pilgrimages,[21] and forms the bulk of present-day popular Hinduism

The Puranic rituals are much simpler than the Vedic ones and universal in their appeal, but the general approach of the authors of the Epics and Puranas is no different from that of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition The ritual of *śrāddha* is given great importance in the *Mahābhārata* and Puranas It is joined together in the Purānas with the ritual of pilgrimage Pilgrimage is the chief of Puranic rituals and is popular even now among all classes of Hindus Each Purana has its own favourite *tirtha* or pilgrimage centre and devotes several chapters eulogizing the amazing potency or power of that particular *tirtha* to absolve men of all sins Prayaga, Varanasī, Haridwara, Gaya and Puskara are among the more important pilgrimage centres, but there are innumerable others In the *Āranyaka Parva* of *Mahābhārata* scores of sacred places are enumerated in a short span of ten chapters (chs 80 to 89), and almost identical claims are made on behalf of each of them

Vratas (religious vows and fasts) are another set of rituals, greatly cherished by the Puranas *Vratas* are mostly religious fasts

undertaken on specific religious occasions and are usually consummated with the observance of certain rituals There are innumerable such *vratas* P V Kane has enumerated as many as 1238 *vratas* in the fourth volume of his *History of Dharmaśāstra* Many of these *vratas* have now become obsolete, but there is still a very large number of such fast-cum-festivals observed by people belonging to different regions, castes and sects Though they are supposed to be voluntary, like all Hindu rituals a certain obligation is associated with them Puranas invented exaggerated sanctions to induce people to observe these *vratas* To give but one example, the omission of the observance of *Janmāstami*, the festival associated with the birth of lord Krsna, is compared in *Brahma-vaivarta Purāna* to the murder of hundred brāhmanas ![22] Perhaps the most important of these Puranic rituals is that of the *ekādaśi vrata*[23] or the fast on both the eleventh days of the lunar calendar, followed by the worship of Visnu on the twelfth day The *Padma Purāna* hails the practice of the *ekādaśi* fast as of tremendous merit in the present age of degeneration (*Kali yuga*) According to the *Garuda Purāna*, the merits of the observance of the fast and its associated rituals on the eleventh day of the lunar calendar are greater than the giving away of the entire earth [24] *Nārada Purāna* narrates the story of king Rukmāngada who, when offered the option of either renouncing the *ekādaśi* fast or putting his son to death, opted to kill his son, rather than to forego the fast ![25] Such stories are highly fantastic and suggest a total reversal of all moral values Religious sanction in favour of these fasts is so strong that a vast majority of Hindus still observe them They even force other members of the family, specially ladies, to observe these fasts, sometimes even at the cost of their lives (Such extreme practices are becoming increasingly less common)

On the credit side, these religious fasts demand great self-restraint on the part of the subject and express a strong faith and an equally strong will Similarly, pilgrimages used to and even now involve great hardships, so that it is something a person does or undergoes that is supposed to secure the fruits of the ritual, and not merely some ritual performed by the priests, as in the Vedic tradition On the whole, these Puranic rituals are very different from, much less elaborate and much more universal

than, the Vedic rituals But the spirit in which they are performed is more or less the same as that of Vedic ritualism External act or observance, and not inner spirit or any moral qualification, is more important and is supposedly conducive to the attainment of the desired result For example, a person desirous to observe the fast dedicated to Santosī Mata is expected to eat only once and avoid all sour things on Fridays This simple observance is expected to secure the fulfilment of all one's desires ! And if one fails in the above ritualistic observance, one is sure to incur the wrath of the goddess and suffer all sorts of calamities !

(v) The Tantric tradition not only exalted the rituals, it declared them to be capable of sanctifying apparently immoral acts Tantras are a class apart and do not represent the main stream of Hindu religio-philosophy We would have left them, but for the fact that Tantras are even now popular among certain sections of the Hindu society Tantras expressed a strong world-and-life-affirmation and advocated the well-known practice of *pañca-makāras* or five prohibited objects which should instead be made a means of final liberation, viz wine, meat, fish, *mudrā* (ritualistic configuration of fingers or the woman as a partner in the Tantric practice) and sex It was argued that these objects or various enjoyments are sinful in themselves, but if they are enjoyed according to the rules and with the recitation of *mantras,* they become conducive to final liberation

Tantras openly upheld magical powers (*siddhis*) which could be used for the following six ends—avoidance of some evil or physical illness (*sānti*), bringing people and gods under one's control (*vasikarana*), blocking other men's activities (*stambhana*), creating enmity among friends (*vidvesana*), causing the ouster of some person from one's territory (*uccātana*) and killing or inflicting fatal injuries on others (*mārana*) Various Puranas, especially the *Matsya Purāna*, have recognized these Tantric powers [26]

Men everywhere have their baser desires, and it is the task of religion and morality to control or sublimate them and not to encourage and sanction them When this is done in the name of religion, both religion and morality suffer as a consequence Though theoretically the Tantric way of life is supposed to lead one to the realization of one's transcendent nature, in practice, Tantric practices are mostly undertaken with the purpose of

acquiring ritualistic powers (*siddhis*) The masses are not permitted to participate in the Tantric rituals, but they are often eager to benefit from the Tantric powers that are supposedly acquired by the adepts Now, inasmuch as the acquisition of these powers does not usually require any moral qualifications, and they can be used for highly immoral purposes without inviting any censure from the society, the Tantric way implies a total negation of all ethical norms and values

Luckily the inherent moral consciousness of Indians (Hindus) was too strong to accept such a perversion of values, and there was a persistent outcry against the Tantric practices which found frequent expression in ancient literature [27] This forced the Tantrikas to remain largely an esoteric group and protected the masses from its evil influence

We admit that our understanding of the Tantric tradition is necessarily incomplete and superficial We have not at all considered the philosophical aspects of the tradition or the rationalizations of the Tantric philosophy and practices offered by such modern scholars as Gopinath Kaviraja Given the limitation of our understanding, we still think that the Tantric tradition has exerted an unhealthy influence on Hindu morality

II Equation of Morality with Ritualistic Religion

It may be argued here that we might well have successfully criticized Hindu ritualism, but it does not necessarily follow that the same criticism would apply to Hindu ethics But the truth of the matter is that Hinduism hardly ever makes a distinction between rituals and morality proper These religious or semi-religious rituals would not have mattered much, had they not claimed to exhaust the entire field of *dharma* or morality The hold of ritualistic tradition on Hindu morality is possibly due to the one word *dharma* being used for both ritualistic acts (misnamed religion in the English language) and what we now consider morality proper

(1) The philosophy of Mīmamsa has played a very important role in the development of the ritualistic tradition The main subject matter of Mīmamsa inquiry is *dharma*, as is clear from the very first Mīmamsa Sūtra—"*Athāto dharma-jijñāsā* (now begins

an enquiry into *dharma*) " According to Śabara, *dharma* being a supernatural object, it cannot be known either through perception, or on the authority of other persons, as human intellect is fallible Vedas are, therefore, the only source of knowledge of *dharma* Mīmamsa asserts the infallibility of Vedas and the absoluteness of Vedic commands regarding *dharma* Those Smrti texts which are not opposed to *Śruti* (Vedas) are also to be followed in the performance of *dharma* [28]

This is a doctrine which understands morality exhaustively in terms of Vedic commands (*vidhi*) and prohibitions (*nisedha*) The second *Mimāmsā Sūtra* gives the famous definition of *dharma*—'*Codanālaksanortho dharmah*', that is to say, *dharma* is that good (*artha*) which is characterized by Vedic injunctions or commands (*codanā*)

A few things are to be noted here First, all *dharma* necessarily means *karma* or action and hence is related to the will which is supposed to be impelled by the Vedic commands Secondly, this *dharma* cannot be known by man's reason, so that it is solely derivable from the Vedic commands That means, no act is good or bad in itself, but is so because and only because it is commanded or prohibited in Vedas This denies all autonomy to morality and completely subordinates it to a very narrow ritualistic concept of religion Śabara was of the opinion that only those acts which are of the nature of *artha* (good) and are enjoined by the Vedas are to be regarded as *dharma*, and not those actions which are of the nature of *anartha* (evil), a stock example of the latter being the *Śyena* sacrifice According to him, inasmuch as violence cannot be commanded, Vedic injunctions pertaining to such acts cannot be called *dharma* They are just hypothetical imperatives to the effect that whosoever wants to destroy his enemies should perform the *Śyena* sacrifice [29] While Prabhakara agreed with Śabara, writers like Umbeka Bhatta and Kumarila emphatically argued that whatever is enjoined by the Vedas is *dharma*, and that positively includes *Śyena* sacrifice which is to be regarded as *dharma*, since it has been enjoined by the Vedas [1] This discussion absolutely and irrevocably reduces morality to Vedic commands Thirdly, not to leave any doubts, Mīmamsa thinkers have affirmed that by *dharma* is meant Vedic sacrifices and not such altruistic acts (*paropakāra*) as digging wells and planting trees [30] The Mīmam-

sakas thus seem to have no confusion regarding *dharma* which they regard as consisting of ritualistic acts only

It is, therefore, sometimes suggested that since Mīmāmsā concerns itself exclusively with Vedic rituals, the *dharma* of Mīmāmsā need not be understood in the same sense as the *dharma* or duty in the moral context It is argued here that the 'ought' in the ritualistic context is not the same as the 'ought' in the moral context But this is not the case The meaning of the term *dharma* in Mīmamsā is what ought to be done or duty It is in this sense only that *dharma* is considered as an object of Vedic commands The form of the command or the meaning of the 'ought' in the ritualistic context is exactly the same as that in the moral context According to Mīmamsa, the central idea in the Vedic command or imperative (*vidhi*) is action, and the *vidhi* is recognized by its formal character which includes some verb in the imperative mood Śabara has quoted some old verse to the effect that *vidhi* or command is known by such phrases as, 'one should do it', 'it should be done', 'it ought to be done', 'it should be so' and 'it ought to be so'[31] This means that the Vedic command is expressed by, and *dharma* is known through, the verb in the imperative mood (*vidhi lin*) In the imperative sentence the verb used, as *yajeta* (you ought to perform the sacrifice), consists of two parts—while the first part consists of the root form (*dhātu*) of the verb expressing the nature of the act, the second part or the suffix (*pratyaya*) is in the imperative mood (*vidhi lin*) *Lintva* or the imperatival form of the verb is thus the essence of the command, and inasmuch as *dharma* is what is commanded by the Vedas, it becomes the essence of *dharma* also

According to Prabhākara, the Vedic command (*niyoga*) does not impel the will, but constitutes an authoritative suggestion to the will (*preranā*) which results in the appropriation by the self of the commanded act as one which ought to be done by oneself The power of motivation of the command lies in this cognition of obligation by the self Prabhakara also insists that the expectation of some good to be attained does not at all enter into one's performance of duties, especially the unconditional ones (*nitya karma*)[32] Now, if Prabhakara first explains *dharma* in terms reminiscent of Kant's categorical imperative, that is, in strictly ethical terms, and then understands *dharma* exclusively as ritual-

istic acts commanded by the Vedas, it means that ritualistic acts and moral duty are not differentiated by Prabhākara

The idea of 'ought' is central to the ritualistic concept of *dharma*, and it is the same as the 'ought' of morality When Mīmamsā, Vedas and Dharmaśastras tell a man that a given ritual is what he ought to perform, and when another thinker commands that he ought to speak the truth, an average Hindu does not think that they are speaking of different things The same is true of prohibitions Most of the Vedic prohibitions are of a ritualistic nature, the conventional example being, 'you ought not to eat *kalañja*' The logical form of the negative command (*nisedha*) is in no way different from the negative moral commands, as 'you ought not to commit adultery' Thus, the entire discussion of *dharma* by Mīmāmsa unequivocally identifies ritualistic duty with moral duty, both being understood as what ought to be done or *dharma*

(ii) Dharmasastras equally make no distinction between *dharma* as ritualistic duty and *dharma* as moral duty All their discussions of duty, sin and repentence refer to ritualistic and moral duties jointly As we have seen in our previous section, most of the *Smārta* taboos are amoral and irrational, but they are given in a typically moralistic language, such as, "Let him never look at the sun Let him never cross over the rope binding a calf "[33] Since the Smrtis are supposed to govern the entire life of the Hindus, presentation of amoral acts as one's duty must create confusion in their minds regarding the meaning and content of moral duty

All Dharmasastras indiscriminately combine the two kinds of duties while giving the duties of the four classes (*varnas*) [34] For example, the duties of the three upper classes include the study of Vedas and performance of Vedic sacrifices which are clearly ritualistic duties In addition, they have their specific caste duties (*varnāsrama dharma*), and all of them are denoted by the word *dharma* In fact, the meaning of the term *dharma* has very important ritualistic overtones Vedas and after them Smrtis are universally regarded as the chief sources of *dharma*[35] Since the chief concern of the Vedas is ritualistic acts, it can be taken for granted that the *dharma* which is based on the Vedas would be largely ritualistic in character

(iii) Even other religious texts like the *Bhagavadgitā* have used the term *dharma* for both ritualistic and socio-moral duties It is to be remembered that there is no separate term for moral duty in Sanskrit The two terms, *dharma* and *karma*, have been indiscriminately used both for ritualistic and moral duties In the following passages of the *Bhagavadgitā* the term *karma* is used for socio-moral duty

"Thy concern is with action or duty (*karma*) alone, never with results Let not the fruits of action be thy motive "[36] And,

"Devoted each to his own duty (*karma*) man attains perfection "[37]

In the famous verses exhorting men to follow their respective caste duties the *Gitā* has used both terms, *karma* and *dharma*, to indicate one's socio-moral duties [38] At the same time, the *Gitā* also uses both the terms to denote ritualistic duties or sacrifices It asserts that the ordained duties (*niyata karma*) should always be performed, and explains them in terms of sacrifice (*yajña*) Of course, sacrifice has got a very broad meaning in the *Bhagavadgitā*, but its ritualistic content is undeniable [39] Śamkara also understands the term *niyata karma* used in the *Gitā* as *nitya karma* (daily obligatory rituals) [40] According to the *Bhagavadgitā*, *dharma* or *karma* consists of all the duties which have been enjoined in the scriptures, and they include both ritualistic and caste duties It is the *Gitā's* contention that the ritualistic duties help in the harmonious functioning of the world order, while the caste duties are essential for the smooth functioning and stability of the social order And there is no distinction between the ritualistic and caste or socio-moral duties for the *Bhagavadgitā*

The *Bhagavadgitā* is not a work belonging to the ritualistic tradition Yet it understands duty (*dharma* or *karma*) in terms of Vedic sacrifices (*yajña*), and confuses between the ritualistic and moral meanings of the term *dharma* (duty) We can discern here the overwhelming influence of the ritualistic tradition on entrei Hindu ethical thought It is our contention, therefore, that the ritualistic tradition unequivocally identifies morality with rituals, generally reduces moral duty to ritualistic acts and conceives sin and repentance in entirely externalistic terms This equation between the ritualistic and the moral meanings of *dharma*

(duty) has constantly undermined a rational approach to moral matters, and indirectly discouraged truly moral concerns

III An Amoral Concept of Sin

The confusion between the ritualistic and moral points of view is similarly expressed in the popular Hindu concept of sin

(i) The externalistic ritualism of the Brahmanas naturally resulted in an equally externalistic and amoral conception of sin The Brāhmanas with their ritualistic bias conceived sin as some external matter which can be washed off with water or holy grass Sin was supposed to be the effect of some ritualistic transgression Truth was a highly valued moral virtue in the Brahmanas, but even the sin accruing from the transgression of truth was declared to be washable with external means [41]

(ii) The Dharmasastric stance in this matter is no less unfortunate The *Gautama-Dharmasūtra* defines sin as

"Man becomes sinful in this world by evil acts, such as performing sacrifice for undeserving persons, eating uneatable things like garlic, speaking untruth or indecent things, not doing ordained rituals or doing prohibited acts "[42]

All the Smrtis agree on the list of five great sins, viz murder of a brahmana, drinking, adultery with one's teacher's wife (or some close elderly relative), stealing a brahmana's gold and association with the above four sinners There follows a list of sins which are equal to the above sins in gravity, and this second list includes eating uneatable things ! The list of minor sins (*up-pātaka*), given in all the Smrtis, consists of petty acts of commission and omission, such as selling prohibited objects, felling trees, eating prohibited food and working in mines or on machines etc [43] The damage to a healthy ethical approach was even greater, as such ritualistic offences were grouped together with the murder of all human beings, except brahmanas (yes, murder was a minor crime in the Smrtis) On another occasion, Manu has given the list of brahmanas who are not worthy of being invited for a *śrāddha* rites and who should not be given gifts, presumably because they are sinners The offences which disqualified a brahmana consisted of acts of moral transgression like theft, adultery etc as also morally innocent acts like teach-

ing a sūdra, selling prohibited objects, or even marrying before one's elder brother ! Even innocent professions like being a courier of the king were regarded as disqualifying Certain physical defects, such as being one-eyed or bald or having ugly teeth or nails, were treated as detestable and sure signs of one's being a sinner [44]

Thus, sin was mostly conceived in the Dharmaśāstras as a result of the commission of certain amoral acts or omission of certain other ritualistic acts One of the most important subjects of discussion of the Dharmasastras and later Nibandhas is penance Penance was first conceived as voluntarily undergoing severe mortification of the flesh in repentance for one's sins All Dharmasāstras prescribe most severe penances for the major sins [45] Such severe mortification of the body would naturally purge the heart of its sinful tendencies But the Law-givers soon realized that very few people would be capable of undertaking such severe penances, and so they went on to prescribe petty ritualistic acts as substitutes for the harsh penances Manu gives a list of several alternative penances, such as studying the Vedas, performing five daily sacrifices, undertaking certain specified fasts, giving gifts, performing yoga exercises and repeating the sacred syallable *Om*, all guaranteed as capable of absolving men of all sins He then goes on to offer several Vedic texts and promises that a ritualistic repetition of either one of them for a prescribed number of times absolves a man of all but the most heinous sins [46] At one place Manu prescribes a ritual for a man who has violated his vow of celibacy during studenthood It consists of a sacrifice with the tallow of a one-eyed donkey at the road crossing ![47] How this magical rite can purify a man's heart is anyone's guess

Of course, Manu and other Law-givers equally emphasized moral duty, right moral attitude and true heart-felt repentance But the fact that they prescribed petty amoral ritualistic acts as penances for almost all sins must have eroded the consciousness of moral responsibility among the masses and distorted their moral perspective

(iii) If Manu and other Law-givers had any reservations about the efficacy of rituals in absolving men of all sins, they were shed by the authors of the Epics and Puranas As we have

seen, they advocated rituals of their own and claimed that these rituals, especially pilgrimages, are capable of destroying all one's sins It was claimed for each and every pilgrimage centre (*tirtha*) that a visit to it, or a bath in its river destroys all one's sins It was further declared by several Purānas and *Mahābhārata* that all who die in the Avimukta region of Varanasī, including the gravest sinners and even sub-human beings, are automatically released from transmigratory existence[48] The *Mahābhārata* eulogizes river Ganga and declares that not only are its sacred waters capable of destroying all one's sins, bathing in it results in freedom from transmigratory existence of several generations of one's ancestors and even that of the future progeny! It adds that mere remembrance of the river Ganga destroys all one's sins[49] Even after leaving allowance for poetic exaggeration, such pronouncements do belittle the idea of the gravity of sin and suggest an undermining of the idea of moral accountability

As we have seen, the Brāhmanas conceived sin as some external pollution which can be got rid off with the use of water or holy grass The Dharmasāstras corrected this externalistic concept to a certain extent, though their perception of sin was marred by their ritualistic bias The Puranas apparently reverted to the view of the Brahmanas and conceived sin as something to be washed off by a dip in the holy waters of various sacred rivers If sin generally results from the commission of some external act, and if it can be got rid off by some ritualistic act, then, sin must pertain to the body and cannot involve one's inmost being Such a view goes against the moral point of view according to which it is the inner attitude that determines the moral quality of an act, and indulgence in sin leaves a deep scar on one's inner being which cannot be healed so easily by petty ritualistic observances

IV The Fruits of Rituals and the Desire For Them As the Motive

(1) Traditionally, all Hindu religious texts, from the Vedas to Puranas, claim that the religious practices or rituals advocated by them, if practised properly, would bring prosperity and happiness to the devout The Brahmanas regarded their rituals as sufficiently potent to bring about the desired results without the mediation of gods They also gave fantastic stories regarding

certain persons who supposedly benefited from the performance of their rituals. The Dharmasāstras and Purānas substituted their own simpler rituals for the more expensive and elaborate Vedic rituals. But the general approach, the ritualistic bias and the tendency to make fantastic claims for the rituals, found in the Brāhmanas, continued to characterize the later works. The authors of Dharmasāstras and Puranas made similarly exaggerated and irrational claims regarding the efficacy of their rituals in producing the desired results. For example, Āpastamba has listed days when if a *srāddha* is performed, it is sure to bring about certain results. Thus, if a *srāddha* is performed on the third day of the second half of the month, one would have sons, but if it is performed on the first day, one would have only daughters.[50] Such fanciful claims encourage dogmatism which naturally hampers the development of a positive rational morality.

Puranas and the Epics sought to give the masses a religion suited to their needs and intellectual capacities. Lest the masses feel deprived of their right to learn the Vedas and perform Vedic sacrifices, extravagant claims were made on behalf of the new rituals. The *Visnu Purāna* describes Vyasa as praising *Kali yuga* (the present age of moral degeneration), as it is only in *Kali yuga* that a very small amount of effort results in great merit (*dharma*), whereas in earlier ages, when moral and spiritual values prevailed, much greater effort, in the form of sacrifices and hard austerities was needed in order to secure the same amount of merit.[51] The sentiment is repeated in other Puranas also. But no rational explanation is given as to why in the present age, when man has become degenerate, he has to put in less, instead of more, effort in order to secure merit or moral excellence. Their only intention being popular appeal, the authors of Puranas competed with each other in offering the easiest possible panacea for all the ills of life. For example, both *Mahābhārata* and *Padma Purāna* contend that since the Vedic and Smarta sacrifices cannot be performed in the present *Kali* age, people should undertake fasting on both the eleventh days (*ekādaśi*) of the lunar calendar which involves very little botheration and expenditure, but is sure to give the greatest fruit.[52] On another occasion, the *Padma Purāna* declares that the merit of the man who gives a single candle (*dipa*) on the eleventh lunar day of the month of *kārttika* is beyond measure.[53]

The *Brahma-vaivarta Purāna* assures that the man who forms a single *Śivalinga* of clay would reside in heaven for hundred long ages (*kalpas*) [54] The *Padma Purāna* narrates the story of two brothers who had wasted their lives in carnal pleasures After death, one was awarded hell, while the other was sent to heaven It was so because the latter had once bathed in the Yamuna river in the month of *Māgha* ![55]

Similarly fantastic claims were made for each and every Puranic ritual, as pilgrimage, bathing in certain rivers, especially on certain days, performance of obsequial rites (*śrāddha*), observance of religious vows or fasts, giving gifts to brāhmanas, reading Puranas and repeating (*japa*) some religious text or formula (*mantra*) Each Purana had its own favourite pilgrimage centre and claimed that a visit to that *tirtha*, or even mere remembrance thereof, would not only absolve a man of all sins, but also secure heaven or even release from transmigratory existence for him

Reading or listening to Puranas and other religious texts was another typical Puranic ritual for which similar tall claims were made The Epics, Puranas and other religious texts, all end with lengthy benedictory statements promising the highest merit and all imaginable rewards to the man or woman who listens to their stories To give a typical example, the *Rāmāyana* claims

"Should anybody read or adore this old history, he or she will be absolved of all sins and will enjoy longevity Ksatriyas should hear this tale from brahmanas and they will get wealth and sons If one hears the whole of *Rāmāyana* he (lord Rama) will be pleased This history is so very efficacious "[56]

Listening to the stories of Puranas, especially the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, is even now regarded as of tremendous merit, the emphasis being on mere listening and not on conduct or right inner attitude Puranas contain excellent moral precepts, but their major bulk consists of mythological stories These stories are narrated in an extremely exaggerated style which has fascinated the masses for centuries The illiterate credulous listeners of the Puranic stories do not have enough discrimination to discount such exaggerations as mere poetic licence A heavy and regular dose of Puranic mythology must necessarily engender dogmatism or an irrational approach to life and morality, and thus confuse the moral perspective

(ii) This tradition frankly admits that the universal motive for the performance of *dharma*, both in the ritualistic and moral contexts, is the desire for the good fruits that are expected to accrue from the performance Śabara and Kumarila of Mīmāmsā school of philosophy emphasized the role of desire for some specific gain in inducing a man to obey a Vedic command or perform some ritual The Vedic command was generally understood as a hypothetical imperative, the hackneyed example being, 'if you desire heaven perform this sacrifice (*svargakāmo yajeta*)!' According to Śabara, Vedic commands are of the form, 'you ought to perform *Agnistoma*' If it is asked how, the answer is, 'with *soma*', if it is asked why, the answer is 'for heaven' [57] For Kumārila, the attainment of some good (*hita-prāpti*) is the motive behind all positive willing or activity (*pravrtti*), while the avoidance of evil (*ahita-parihāra*) is the universal motive for desisting from willing (*nivrtti*) [58] Most Mīmāmsa thinkers, with the exception of Prabhakara, contend that even though the authority of the scriptural imperative is independent of the desire on the part of the individual, a man does not take up any duty commanded by the scriptures, unless he is prompted by desire for some end to be attained by the act commanded Kumarila has categorically affirmed that all men act with some specific gain in mind and that, "not even fools act without some purpose in view "[59]

Interestingly, all orthodox schools of thought accept the Mīmamsā view of action or duty According to the *Vaiśesika Sūtras*, "*Dharma* is that from which (results) the accomplishment of exaltation or well-being (*abhyudaya*) and the realization of the highest good (*nihśreyasa*)" [60] *Dharma* or duty here is conceived not as an end-in-itself, but as a means of the realization of well-being here and release or heaven hereafter

The Dharmasastras clearly follow the ritualistic tradition and acknowledge the role of desires in inducing man to follow the path of *dharma* According to Āpastamba, a man who fulfils his assigned duties properly enjoys birth in a distinguished family, beauty of form, wisdom and wealth here and heavenly bliss hereafter [61] It suggests that the desire for the good fruits of the performance of one's duties is a legitimate motive for their performance Manu has frankly accepted personal gain as the most significant motive for the performance of one's duties

"It is not good to desire the fruits of actions, but it is not necessary to give up desires Both the acceptance of Vedas and the performance of Vedic acts are motivated by desire

"No act is undertaken by a man without desire in this world Whatever a man does is the result of desire "[62]

This necessary relation between desire and duty has been further strengthened by the exaggerated claims of Puranic authors regarding the fruits of their particular rituals These claims have engendered an attitude of expectation among the masses regarding the beneficial results of various rituals As a result, most of the Hindu *vratas* are undertaken by people, especially ladies, with specific desires for the long life and prosperity of their loved ones Since moral duties are scarcely distinguished from religious acts in Hinduism, the habit of performing one's religious duties with the definite expectation of rewards can easily transfer itself to socio-moral duties If it happens, it would naturally be detrimental to the interests of genuine morality which necessarily judges the moral worth of an action on the basis of the motive for its performance

V *Amoral Implications of Hindu Polytheism*

Brāhmanical ritualism has been closely allied to popular polytheism since the Vedic times While various gods occupied quite a prominent place in the Vedas, their role became rather secondary in the Brahmanas The same is also true of the Dharmasastras in which gods seem to be mere abstractions, referred to and worshipped as a class only There was a resurrection of Vedic polytheism with the Epics and Purānas Or it may be that polytheism continued to dominate popular religion all the while, only it found a fresh expression in Purānas which were avowedly concerned with the religion of the masses By the time of Puranas almost all Vedic gods were replaced by new Hindu gods Similarly, old Vedic sacrifices were substituted by simpler Puranic rituals, as *vratas* and pilgrimages But though both gods and rituals have changed, the approach of the devout Hindus towards their gods has continued to be the same through the centuries The Vedic seers sang hymns and performed sacrifices with the firm expectation that the gods, thus appeased, would confer the

desired boons on them The present-day Hindus similarly visit various holy places and temples, perform certain rituals, observe certain fasts or religious vows (*vratas*) with the expectation of receiving favours from the gods in return The entire relation between the devotee and the gods in the polytheistic tradition seems to be based on the spirit of business transaction Even the *Bhagavadgitā*, a highly ethical and theistic work, has accepted the legitimacy of such an approach

"With this (sacrifice) do you nourish the gods, and the gods shall nourish you

"Nourished by the sacrifice, the gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments you desire "[63]

Hindu polytheism has exerted some rather unhealthy influence on Hindu morality Since various gods are mostly worshipped by their devotees with some personal motive, the practice of polytheism in the Hindu society has reinforced the old Vedic connection between *dharma* or duty and desire-fulfilment, and has thereby undermined the very basis of genuine morality

This approach has also cheapened religious piety and by implication has made ethical qualifications irrelevant for both religion and social life As the goal of desire-fulfilment can be achieved by appeasing anyone of the various gods through the observance of some ritual or the other, moral considerations become rather secondary in this approach, at least at the level of popular religion Puranas have given stories of gods, especially Śiva, giving all sorts of boons, including vastly destructive weapons, to blatantly immoral persons Many of the heroes of Mahābhārata war, belonging to the two opposing camps, possessed highly destructive weapons, given to them by lord Śiva, thus ensuring the mutual destruction of both the armies A widely repeated mythological story tells how the gods (*devas*) deprived the demons (*asuras*) of their share of the nectar which the two had churned together out of the ocean The *Mahābhārata* frankly points out that the gods (*devas*) could secure heaven only by deceiving their half-brothers (*asuras*) [64] Puranas narrate innumerable stories in which gods are portrayed as no better than humans The Puranic gods constantly suffered from jealousy, fear and lust, were often faced with difficult situations and were quite willing to use immoral

means to achieve their ends The *Bhāgavata Purāna* and other religious texts give stories of Krsna's amorous plays with the milkmaids of Vrndāvana These stories can be allegorically explained as the soul's love for her Divine Beloved But the masses who have been listening to these stories for centuries do not understand the mystical language and take them literally In the *Mahābhārata* Krsna emerges as a man of practical wisdom who is not very particular about moral norms

In fact, excepting Rama, most other Hindu gods are generally portrayed as amoral persons When a devotee worships them and constantly hears the narrations of their deeds with the firm conviction that it would bring great merit to him, the moral values (or lack of them), as exemplified by the divine heroes of Puranic stories, are bound to affect him Add to it the general conviction in the Hindu mind that a man can appease these gods by the observance of certain rituals and get the desired boon (s), and we get a rather amoral approach to religion The ubiquitous presence of religion in Hindu society may well lead to a certain transference of this amoral attitude to socio-moral matters, thus undermining a truly moral approach to life

VI Conclusion

We are here aware that our version of Hindu ritualism is possibly a one-sided one Every religion has its own rituals and most of these rituals are amoral The Eucharist of the Christians is in no way more moral or spiritual than the *śrāddha* of the Hindus Taken individually, there is nothing morally objectionable in most Hindu rituals Rituals, in fact, are an integral part of every religion and culture Every society has its own rituals and social customs, and their observance by the members of that society binds them together in fellowship and harmony Our criticism of the ritualistic approach in Hinduism is mostly based on certain observations concerning its ramifications for the morality of Hindu society

First, we feel that when there is an unchecked proliferation of rituals, it necessarily diverts the mind from the more vital issues of religion and morality Rituals are hardly ever conceived and executed at a rational level, and they generally discourage a

rational approach to life and morality. Also, the emphasis on the external act in the ritualistic tradition endangers the moral approach for which the inner attitude is far more important than the external act. When rituals take the centre of stage in a man's life, the practice of virtues and righteous conduct become rather secondary for him. Those men who are extremely religious, i.e. perform all possible rituals and spend hours in morning *pūjā* (idol worship), are generally quite casual about their socio-moral duties. Secondly, the ritualistic approach has persistently undermined morality by neglecting to include moral character and conduct among the qualifications for the performance of rituals. In fact, moral qualities are often implicitly assumed to be irrelevant for the performance of various rituals. There has been a complete sundering of morality from religion in the ritualistic tradition. One can be religious and hope to earn religious merit through the performance of rituals without being a morally upright person. Given the central place and prestige of religion in the Hindu society, the negative ramifications of this approach for practical morality are too obvious to be argued in detail.

Thirdly, the traditional understanding of duty largely in terms of ritualistic acts, and the use of identical terminology to express both ritualistic and moral commands and prohibitions have confused the moral perspective of the Hindus, resulting in a general undermining of true moral concerns. Most Hindus take recourse to this equation between ritualistic and moral duty in order to avoid their actual socio-moral obligations in daily life. The performance of funeral rites is given greater importance than actually caring for, or serving, one's parents. The duties towards one's fellow beings are supposedly discharged by throwing a microscopic quantity of food on the ground, and so on.

Fourthly, the assertion of a necessary ralation between desire for fruits and the performance of (ritualistic) duty denies the worth of the true moral motive, i.e. the performance of the duty for duty's sake. It may be argued here that actions can still be moral if they are performed with some utilitarian end in view. But such an end or good must have intrinsic worth in order to confer moral worth on duty which is instrumental to

it, and the desire for some personal gain as the motive for the performance of rituals does not have any intrinsic worth

Lastly, the excessive importance given to ritualistic purity in this tradition has continuously strengthened caste discriminations and even the practice of untouchability This tradition has also contributed to the general undermining of the position of women in the society, both because they are considered to be less pure than men, and because they cannot perform the funeral rites which are extremely important in this tradition The ritualistic tradition has thus been the greatest cause of the practice of social discriminations in the Hindu society

At the same time, the above is only one side of the medal *Dharma* not only means ritualistic duty, it also means morality or righteousness And it is in this sense that the term *dharma* is mostly used in the *Dharmaśāstras*, Epics and Puranas The aim of our discussion has only been to point out certain negative contributions of the ritualistic tradition to the development of Hindu morality We believe that they can easily be counterbalanced by a renewed emphasis on the genuinely moral aspects of the Brahmanical tradition and a deliberate distinction between the ritualistic and moral meanings of *dharma* or duty (ought)

Notes

1 Maurice Phillips, *The Teaching of the Vedas* (1976), pp 29 ff, 40 ff, 139 ff, 190ff Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions* (1978), pp 43 ff

2 *Social and Religious Life in the Grhya Sutras* (1954), p 65, also see ibid, pp 66 ff, 72 ff

3 For a detailed account of Vedic rituals see *The Cultural Heritage of India* (1975), vol I, pp 237 ff, 248 ff, and *History* (1974), vol II, chs XXIX to XXXV

4 See *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol I, p 251

5 See ibid, p 253, *History*, vol II p 1247, Maurice Phillips, op cit, pp 190 ff

6 *Mimamsa Sūtra* VIII, 1 32 34, quoted in *History* (1975), vol V, p 1270

7 *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol I, pp 234, 236, 245, 251

8 *Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals* (1974), p 26

9 *Aitareya Brahmana* I 26, quoted in ibid, p 27

10 Ibid I 25, quoted in ibid, p 27

11 For an account of *Grhya* rituals see *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol I, pp 254 ff
12 *M S* III 68 ff
13 Ibid II 92
14 Ibid III 274-275, IX 137-138
15 Ibid III 266 ff, *Āpast D S* II 7 16 23 to II 7 17 3
16 *M S* XI 41
17 Ibid V 57 ff, 85-86, *Āpast D S* I 5 15 8 ff, I 5 16 18 ff
18 *M S* IV 205 ff, *Āpast D S* I 5 16 22 ff, I 5 17 1 ff
19 *M S* V 5 ff, 19-20
20 Ibid IV 37 ff, *Gaut D S* IX 8 ff, 38 ff
21 *See History*, vol V, pp 913 ff
22 Vide H H Wilson, *Analysis of Puranas* (1976), p 48
23 Vide *History*, vol V, pp 43-45, 93, 96-99, 104, 934
24 Vide ibid, vol V, p 99
25 Vide H H Wilson, op cit, preface, p 32
26 *See History*, vol V, pp 1113-14
27 Ibid, vol V, pp 1073-76
28 *Mimamsa Sūtra, Śabara Bhasya* I 1 5, also see *History*, vol V, pp 1202-4, 1224
29 Ibid I 1 2
30 Ibid I 3 2
31 Ibid IV, 3 3, quoted in *History*, vol V, p 1226
32 See S K Maitra, *The Ethics of the Hindus* (1963), pp 29 ff, 136 ff
33 *M S* IV 37 ff
34 Ibid I 87-91, cf *B G* XVIII 41-45
35 Ibid II 6-11
36 *B G* II 47
37 Ibid XVIII 45
38 Ibid XVIII 45-48
39 Ibid III 8 ff, XVIII 7, 23
40 *S B*, *B G* III 8
41 *Śatapatha Brahmana* III 1 2 10, III 1 3 18
42 *Gaut D S* XIX 2, cf *M S* V 4
43 *M S* XI 56 ff
44 Ibid III 151 ff, *Gaut D S* XV 16 ff
45 *M S* XI 71 ff
46 Ibid XI 210 ff, 245 ff, 258 ff
47 Ibid XI 118-120, cf *Āpast D S* I 9 26 8
48 See *History* (1974), vol IV, pp 629-630
49 *Mbh Anuś P* XXVII 25 ff, especially 45, 61, 92
50 *Āpast D S* II 7 16 7 ff
51 *Visnu Purana*, bk VI, ch 2 (1972, pp 491-492)
52 Vide *History*, vol V, p 934
53 Vide ibid, vol V, p 45, H H Wilson, op cit, p 64
54 Vide H H Wilson, op cit, p 114

55 Ibid, p 55
56 *Rāmayana, Yuddha Kanda*, ch LXXXVI (1978, pp 562, 563)
57 *Mimamsa Sūtra, Sabara Bhaṣya* I 1 32, II 1 1
58 See S K Maitra, op cit (1963), pp 176 ff, and *History*, vol V, p 1246
59 *Ślokavarttika*, quoted in M Hiriyanna, *The Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (1956) pp 328-329
60 *Vaiśesika Sūtra* I 1 2
61 *Āpast, D S* II 1 2 2 3
62 *M S* II 1-4
63 *B G* III 11-12
64 *Mbh Śan P* VIII 28

CHAPTER III

SOCIO-CENTRIC MORALITY OF DHARMASASTRAS AND EPICS

1 *The Relativistic Approach of Hindu Social Morality*

Dharmasastras are the main source-books of both Hindu ritualism and Hindu social morality The inter-personal morality of Hinduism has been developed in the same Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition which is so much concerned with rituals Ritualism, in a way, pervades the entire outlook of Hindu religious texts But their main concerns are often the stability of the social organization and the advocacy of a social morality that would be conducive to it The ethos behind the two moralities, ritualistic and social, is equally one of world-and-life-affirmation The perception of the world as real and meaningful is presupposed both by the performance of rituals and the fulfilment of one's social obligations A unique feature of this whole Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition is that it affirms the legitimacy of the pursuit of one's self-interest, but at the same time contends that there is no conflict between the good of the individual and that of the society This reflects a pious faith in the moral governance of the world and the harmony of interests in such a moral order

Granting that the two moralities of Hindus, social and ritualistic, have originated in the same religio-cultural tradition, they should still be distinguished for two reasons First, while the norms of socio-moral duties, as given in the Dharmasastras, have been almost unanimously accepted by Hindu thinkers, excepting some followers of the tradition of liberation, the tenets of Vedic ritualism have been frequently questioned by the philosophers of liberation and the saints of devotional sects Secondly, even though the Dharmasastras are a very important source of Hindu social morality, the latter has been constantly

enriched by the contribution of other Sanskrit works, especially the Epics. On the other hand, the Dharmasastras are the supreme, or almost the only, source of present-day Hindu ritualism.

Morality has never been discussed in Hindu works as a separate discipline. But the genuineness of the socio-moral concerns of Hindu thinkers and Law-givers (*Smrtikāras*) is un-deniable. The term *dharma* is derived from the root *dhr*, meaning to sustain or support, that is, *dharma* is what sustains or supports the society.[1] This definition of *dharma* has given a slight bias to the entire Hindu thought in favour of social stability. The main emphasis of Hindu Law-givers has been on those duties of the individual which directly contribute to the stability and harmonious preservation of the social order. The Hindu thinkers recognize both, man's universal duties (*sādhārana dharma*) which appertain to him as man and his specific or class duties which are obligatory upon him by virtue of his class and stage of life (*varnāsrama dharma*). But their chief concern being social stability, they are mainly interested in setting forth the *varnāśrama dharma* which expresses an essentially social, but relativistic, approach to morality.

Hindu social morality is relativistic on several counts. First, man's duties are frankly accepted to be relative to time (*yuga*) and place (*deśa*), so that the *dharma* of one age and region is acknowledged to be non-applicable to another age and place. Secondly, the duties of a person are also strictly relative to his *varna* (class) and the stage of life (*āśrama*). The two together are called *varnāśrama dharma*. Thirdly, the individual's duties are also relative to one's sex. Thus, women of all *varnas* are treated as a class apart, their duties and virtues being very different from those of their menfolk.

Both Manu and Āpastamba contend that along with Vedas and Smrtis, the conduct (*ācāra*) of those Aryans of the three 'upper' classes, who are humble, have full control over their senses and are free from moral vices, is the source of *dharma*, that is, it forms the standard or criterion of man's conduct.[2] Since the Smrtis aim at presenting guidelines for conducting a man's entire life which includes religion, morality, culture and socio-legal matters, the importance given by the Smrtis to the conduct of good men signifies the essentially social character of Dharma-

sāstric morality Āpastamba distinguishes between the *Śrauta* or Vedic *dharma* and the *samayācārika dharma*, i e the *dharma* that has been determined by the *samaya* or pronouncements (agreements) of learned men [3] Here *ācāra* or conduct means an ideal mode of conduct, but gradually any mode of conduct which was practised by the people of a given community came to be known as *ācāra* [4] The importance given to the customs as a source or criterion of man's *dharma* (righteous conduct) expresses the essentially social and relativistic stance of Hindu ethical thinkers

These customs are necessarily relative to time, place and other such factors The Aryans were fully aware of the differences in the customs and conduct of people of different regions of this vast subcontinent True to their syncretic spirit, they accepted these differences and affirmed that customs are relative both to time (*yuga*) and place (*deśa*), as also to caste, guild and even family [5] These customs (*ācāra*) are to be accepted as valid for the particular region in which they are in vogue, with only one condition that they should not contradict the Vedas But these very customs, as marriage between near relations, would be invalid if practised by the people of other regions Similarly, actions and practices, such as *niyoga* which were accepted in the earlier ages, are prohibited in the modern age of *Kali yuga*

All Dharmasāstras seek to protect the various customs and practices of people belonging to different castes, communities and professions They instruct the king that not only should he respect these different customs, but also judge legal cases according to them, as far as possible According to Gautama, the king should accept (in addition to the Vedas and Smrtis) 'the laws of countries, castes and families which are not opposed to the sacred texts' as authoritative in his 'administration of justice' [6] The Dharmaśastras and the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya also instruct the king that he should never seek to impose the customs and practice of his people on the vanquished people, but let them continue to practise their own customs [7]

Now, custom or *ācāra* in this sense is very different from *dharma* The first is what is actually practised by the people, whereas the second refers to what ought to be practised Also, custom refers mostly to amoral practices, such as those followed at the time of various socio-religious functions, as marriage, while *dharma* should

refer strictly to moral matters Hindu thinkers made the mistakes, committed by all naturalistic thinkers of the world, in that they confused the actual practice with the ideal or norm of conduct

II Duties According to One's Caste and Stage of Life

The real emphasis in the social morality of the Dharmasastras and Epics is on the relativity of all duties to the subject's class (*varna*) and stage of life (*āśrama*) *Varnāsrama dharma* is a compound of the twin concepts of *varna dharma* and *āśrama dharma* The two concepts are quite independent of each other, while the first is essentially a social concept, the second is more meaningful in the context of personal morality

(1) We would like to take up the scheme of *āsrama dharma* first It was more of an ideal scheme of life, which was probably followed in its totality by a very few spiritually inclined persons only A few men renounce the world even now, but the complete scheme of four stages of life has become obsolete Of the four stages of life, only that of the householder was conceived in a social context, so that its ideal remains relevant even today The remaining three stages of studenthood, dwelling in the forest and renunciation of the world were mainly concerned with individual self-culture

Theoretically, all males of the three 'upper' classes were expected to follow the scheme of four stages of life But in practice the four consecutive orders were not usually adopted by people, other than the brahmanas It is significant that Manu, after describing the duties of four classes (*varnas*), discusses the four stages under the duties of brahmanas [8] It is but to be expected Not many would have liked to spend a large portion of their lives in theoretical learning alone While the royal sons preferred to have their education at home under expert coaches, vaisyas found apprenticeship with their fathers more useful than lengthy Vedic learning Brahmanas alone adopted regular *brahmacarya*, as a detailed knowledge of the Vedas and allied subjects was required for their particular profession of teaching and priesthood Most people entered the second stage of *grhastha* (married life) after having spent only a few years in formal education

The last two stages of *vānaprastha* (forest-dwelling) and *samnyāsa* (renunciation) were similarly not very common The *Mahābhārata*

clearly states that the stage of renunciation (*samnyāsa*) was meant for the brahmanas only[9] Moreover, if any man wanted to renounce the world, he went to the forest and did not generally become a renunciant And those who went to the forest did so after living very long and full lives as householders, and not in the beginning of the second half of their lives, as stipulated in the scheme of four stages Dasaratha, Dhrtarastra etc were very old indeed when they thought of retiring to the forest Taking up of *samnyāsa* was quite rare in ancient times, and it was only under the impact of the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism that the practice became so prestigious The Dharmasastras and Epics even show some confusion regarding the order and relative worth of these last two stages Both Gautama and Āpastamba regarded the order of the forest-dweller as the highest and the last of all,[10] while the order of the renunciant was recognized as the final one by all the rest[11] When Yudhisthira wanted to renounce the world, he sought to present an ideal picture of a renunciant before his friends But his description shows considerable confusion between the two stages of the forest-dweller and the renunciant[12] It may well suggest that the disciplines of the last two stages were not properly understood till the time of the Epics and Dharmasāstras

Of the four orders, the three, i e those of the student-celibates, forest-dwellers and renunciants, were largely conceived in the context of self-culture The first or *brahmacarya āśrama*, as its name indicates, was a period of learning and strict self-discipline The student-celibates were supposed to have no direct contact with and no definite responsibilities towards the society and dedicated themselves mainly to the quest of personal liberation At the same time, even though no active participation in social matters was expected from men belonging to these three stages of life, they were expected to observe the rules of morality (*dharma*) and ideal social culture (*śistācāra*) There were detailed guidelines for the student-celibates, the forest-dwellers and the renunciants, regarding the proper mode of conduct before one's elders, equals and juniors For example, the list of injunctions and prohibitions for a student-celibate includes total obedience to the teacher, conducting oneself before the teacher and other elders in the most humble manner, as also never indulging in any sensual pleasures or luxuries,

practising the virtues of forgiveness, self-control and perseverance, as also abstaining from the vices of anger, jealousy etc [13] And though many of the virtues of this stage of life were not required to be practised by a graduate-householder (*snātaka*), we can presume that the habits of discipline, self-restraint, and humility, developed during the period of celibacy, would have persisted throughout a man's life

The Dharmaśastras prescribe a separate set of virtues for the forest-dwellers and another for the renunciants The morality expected from these two classes was quite similar, the emphasis being on utmost self-restraint Both the forest-dweller and the renunciant, were expected to practise total control of the senses and the mind, forbearance and equanimity, as also the virtues of friendliness and kindness towards all [14] Though the forest-dweller was expected to live away from the society, in a way his mode of life was a continuation of the householder's life Often accompanied by his wife, he performed all Dharmasastric rituals, maintained the household fire, received guests and gave gifts As depicted in the Epics, the forest-dwellers mostly lived in hermitages, had pupils, maintained communication with the society and played host to kings and others On the other hand, the morality of the renunciants was almost asocial in its conception Unlike the forest-dweller, the renunciant lived in the society and ate cooked food, yet he was constantly admonished to remain alone and completely detached towards all

Unlike the above three orders, that of the householder has been conceived in a decidedly social context Most Hindu religious texts hail the life of the householder as the most worthy mode of life [15] Gautama goes as far as to say that the order of the householder is the only one prescribed by the Vedas and the Dharmasastras [16] What is more, the householder is expected not only to practise all the virtues and perform all the duties which are specifically meant for him, he is also expected to practise virtues like humility and utmost self-restraint which were originally conceived in the context of other orders of life [17] Thus, the morality of the householder is a truly comprehensive one which includes both sets of moral values, concerning inter-personal morality and self-culture

(ii) *Varna dharma* (the duties according to one's caste) refers

mainly to the duties of the householders While the scheme of *āśramas* was more or less optional, that of *varnas* was and even now is compulsory All religious texts agree with the fourfold division of the society into brahmanas, ksatriyas, vaisyas and sūdras Traditionally, the four *varnas* have been grouped into two classes—the twice-born who, having undergone the initiation ceremony (*upanayana*), form the three 'upper' classes and the once-born or sūdras They are also arranged in a hierarchical order—brāhmanas, ksatriyas and then vaisyas, with sūdras forming the lowermost rung of the social hierarchy Briefly, the duties of the four *varnas* were as follows Teaching and study of Vedas, giving and taking gifts (*dāna*) and performing sacrifices for oneself and others were the duties of brahmanas Ksatriyas and vaisyas could not teach Vedas or conduct sacrifices for others, but the daily reading of the Vedas and the performance of daily sacrifices were the duties of all the three classes In addition, ksatriyas were expected to take up arms for the protection of the people, and vaisyas were to engage in business, agriculture and cattle rearing The only duty of the fourth class of sūdras was to serve the three 'upper' classes [18] During emergencies men were allowed to take up the profession of the next 'lower' class, but in no case a man of a 'lower' class was allowed to take up the profession of a 'higher' class [19]

This was the ideal scheme of social organization It was perhaps not always followed in practice, and there was a certain interchange of professions, especially between the topmost classes of brahmanas and ksatriyas Thus, while brahmanas like Drona and Krpa were teachers of martial arts, kings like Janaka and Pravāhana were teachers of supreme knowledge of *Brahman* The same interchange seems to have taken place between the two 'lower' classes of vaisyas and sūdras, at least in the early stages of Aryan expansion Though in actual practice an interchange of professions constantly took place, in theory it was never encouraged Specially brahmanas remained aloof and supreme We have the story of king Matanga who performed the severest penances to attain brahmanahood, but failed He was told that brāhmanahood could not be achieved by any means [20] Since the time of Brahmanas these different classes (*varnas*) have been divided into various castes and sub-castes What is more, gradually they have

become hereditary, so that one belongs to a caste one is born into, irrespective of one's profession and other qualifications

Prof P V Kane[21] has given following broad characteristics of the caste system i hereditary character, ii prohibition of inter-caste marriages, iii prohibition of inter-caste dining, iv profession according to caste, and v the hierarchical order of the castes As the civilization developed, there was naturally greater specialization and greater division of labour, so that new professions came into being and were converted into castes The number of castes and sub-castes has multiplied to an extent that it is no longer possible to arrange them in a hierarchical order These hereditary castes are organized on a more strict basis than earlier *varnas*, resulting in the stratification of the society into innumerable sub-castes The four *varnas* now represent only broad categories into which the innumerable sub-castes can be grouped in a very general way This subject has been studied and discussed at length by various thinkers of such eminence as P V Kane, G S Ghurye, J H Hutton, K M Panikker and Andrey Beteille, that we can hardly hope to add anything new At the same time, the stratification of society into innumerable castes and sub-castes is the one most important factor that has determined the Hindu social organization, its practices and moral values for ages and is, therefore, very important and relevant for our study

It seems to us that three factors contributed most to the development of a rigid caste system—religious sanction, concern for the stability of the society and the racial prejudices of the Aryans, combined with their obsession with ritualistic cleanliness First, religious sanction has been unfortunately quite strong in favour of the caste system The advocates of the caste system happily quote the *Purusa Sūkta*[22] according to which different classes (*varnas*) were produced from different parts of the body of the primeval Being (*Purusa*) The strongest sanction for the caste system comes, however, from the *Bhagavadgītā* Lord Krsna declares that the fourfold order was created by God himself according to the division of *gunas* (constituent elements of *prakrti*) and *karmas* (actions of individual selves) [23] The *Gītā* puts forward the thesis that man's station in life and the duties he is supposed to discharge are in strict accordance with (a) the divine order which is morally just and (b) man's own nature and his past actions It repeatedly

affirms that every man acts according to his own nature and the caste ordained duty is the one to which a man is naturally suited [24] It is so, because both the outward circumstances of a man's life and his inner constitution or nature are the result of his own past actions By implication, if a man is born a sūdra and is forced to do menial jobs, it is what he deserves because of his past actions, and above all, it is what his nature is best suited to do The *Bhagavadgītā*, therefore, advises

"Better is one's own caste duty (*sva-dharma*), though imperfectly carried out, than the *dharma* of another, even if carried out perfectly Better is death in the fulfilment of one's duty, for to follow another's *dharma* is perilous "[25]

Manu, a strong protagonist of caste distinctions, naturally repeats this advice [26] Religious scriptures have thus strongly supported the caste system which they generally consider under the category of *varna*

Secondly, the division of society into various classes and castes was encouraged for its supposedly positive contribution to social harmony It was believed that if people did not submit to the limitations of their respective classes and professions, there would result an overall confusion or chaos in the form of mixing up of classes[27] (which seemed to the ancient Aryans a big catastrophe) On the other hand, if all persons followed their respective class professions, it would help in the preservation of a stable social order Suresvara (vide ch I, section III *supra*) compares the four *varnas* to the four carriers of a palanquin Just as the carrying of a palanquin requires the harmonious motion of the four carriers, so the society requires the harmonious functioning of its four constituent classes

Thirdly, the sharp demarcation between the three twice-born (*dvija*) 'upper' classes and the once-born sūdras possibly originated in the fact that the two, the 'upper' class Hindus and sūdras, originally belonged to two different racial groups As we have seen (ch I, section II *supra*), scholars like P V Kane attach much importance to the meaning of the term *varna* used in the Sanskrit texts to denote various classes According to this view, sūdras were non-Aryans who were accepted into the Aryan society, but were never fully integrated into it Prof Kane points out that the Hindu Law-givers often call sūdras non-Aryans and describe them

in contradistinction to the Aryans [28] The sharp distinction that is everywhere made between the three twice-born classes and sūdras and the extreme ill-treatment of the latter by the former might well have originated in the racial prejudices of the fair-skinned Aryans who looked down upon the relatively dark-complexioned non-Aryans

This possible racial prejudice was combined with ritualistic prejudice against certain professions which seemed to be unclean to the Aryans Hindu obsession with cleanliness thus resulted in a complete segregation of sūdras who followed supposedly unclean professions The list of unclean professions was very wide and not only included cleaners, public executors, meat cutters and fishermen, but also carpenters, iron-mongers, architects, painters and doctors [29] This class of sūdras was further being swelled by the addition of all those 'upper' caste persons who were ousted from their castes due to some ritualistic or moral offence

Manu and other Law-givers have given an entirely different explanation for the development of mixed castes which were invariably adjusted among the lower rungs of the social hierarchy According to it, these mixed castes were the products of inter-caste (*pratiloma*) marriages in which the female spouse is of a higher caste than the male [30] But this could hardly explain the very large number of 'lower' caste people in the Hindu society

Food was the most important field in which the concept of cleanliness was rigorously applied Not only was the food touched by a sūdra considered unfit for consumption, but that touched by any person other than one's near relations or brahmanas was also not to be eaten If one cannot eat the food touched by others, that certainly creates barriers between oneself and others, and must erode fellow-feeling among different members of the society Those who avoid others, lest they pollute their food, can hardly be expected to help them in times of their need

III Exaltation of Brāhmanas, Degradation of Śūdras and The Miscarriage of Justice

(1) Various Dharmasastras, Puranas and the Epics vied with each other in declaring the supremacy of brāhmanas Brahmanas were constantly being compared to gods and were unanimously

declared the highest beings on earth According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*

"Gods are of two kinds, gods of heaven and learned brāhmanas In *yajña* heavenly gods get the oblations and the fees are given to brāhmanas "[31]

According to Manu, brahmana, having been born out of the mouth of Brahmā, is the highest being or lord of the creation and is the personification of *dharma* He is also great because he mediates between men and gods and is equal to, or even greater than, gods [32] The *Mahābhārata* is equally categorical in its praise of brāhmanas as the highest beings on earth, worthy of the greatest reverence and deserving utmost protection and all kinds of gifts from the king [33]

A brahmana was beyond any physical or verbal offence Severest punishments were prescribed for the offender of a brāhmana, especially if he happened to be a sūdra [34] Manu and others even invented terror-inspiring punishments in hell for the offender of a brahmana [35] The brāhmanas could not be given any corporal punishment, were exempt from the state taxes and were thus in general above the law [36] The excessive exaltation of brāhmanas not only resulted in a social order wherein men were basically unequal, it also encouraged the brahmanas to claim transcendence over all law, civil and moral

According to all religious texts, a brahmana deserved reverence simply by virtue of his very birth Thus, a brāhmana boy of ten years was to be respected by a ksatriya man of hundred years,[37] and a brahmana would still command the respect of all other classes, even if he indulged in immoral acts [38] All religious texts were furthermore unanimous in declaring the merits of making gifts to brāhmanas While the Dharmasastras and Epics generally stipulated that only those brahmanas, who were learned and were of high moral character, deserved gifts and invitations for dining,[39] Puranas removed this condition Gradually, it came to be believed that a brahmana unconditionally deserved greatest honour and all kinds of gifts, so that his moral qualifications (or want of them) became a totally irrelevant factor

(ii) The degradation of sūdras is directly proportional to the excessive exaltation of brāhmanas Śūdras were, and even now are, denied the right of undertaking the purificatory rite in the

form of investiture of sacred thread (*upanayana*) which is supposed to give a man his second birth. Thus a sūdra was compulsorily distinguished as once-born from the twice-born (*dvija*) 'upper' classes. A sūdra was not allowed to perform Vedic sacrifices or read or listen to the Vedas; worse still, severest punishments were prescribed and even carried out, if a sūdra even dared to recite, or chanced to hear the Vedas.[40] Even Rama killed a sūdra who dared to perform some penance which was the prerogative of 'upper' classes only.[41] Śamkara, the philosopher who proclaimed one universal Self that is beyond all caste and other distinctions, denied the right of studying Vedas to sūdras. He lamely argued that since sūdras cannot undertake the initiatory rite (*upanayana*), they cannot study Vedas. What is worse, Śamkara has quoted with approval the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* prescribing that the tongue of that sūdra who dared to recite Vedas should be pierced with a hot iron nail and the ears of that sūdra who ever dared to listen to Vedas should be filled with molten lead.[42] It shows how bias can lead to the dehumanization of human conscience and result in the sacrifice of all humanitarian values.

The Law-givers (*Smrtikāras*) repeatedly asserted that the only duty of sūdras was the service of the three 'upper' classes.[43] The *Visnu Purāna*, trying to be liberal, affirmed that sūdras were lucky or blessed, because while the three 'upper' classes had to put in a lot of effort to earn religious merit, sūdras could secure it simply by serving the three 'upper' classes[44]! Such assertions are nothing more than an attempt to deprive sūdras of their birth right to be responsible moral agents.

The right to property was denied to them,[45] they had no social rights as citizens, no right, in fact, as human beings. Manu declares:

'A sūdra, whether bought or unbought, may be compelled to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent to be the slave of a brahmana.

"A sūdra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude. Since that is innate in him, who can set him free from it?"[46]

The Law-givers thus seem to have taken pains to ensure that no shred of human dignity should be left with sūdras. Śūdras were considered so unholy that they could not be given even the

left over food eaten by a brāhmana or a student-celibate [47] Certain sub-castes of śūdras, as cāṇḍālas, were very early declared untouchables Not only was the food touched by a caṇḍāla uneatable, even that seen by him was so! Āpastamba even prescribed that one should speak to a brāhmana after speaking to a low caste sūdra (cāṇḍāla), so as to get rid of the impurity![48] The 'untouchables' were forced to live outside the villages, or near burning grounds Their property consisted only of dogs and donkeys They were expected to wear clothes used for covering dead bodies, eat in broken utensils, and so on [49] They were and even now in practice are prohibited to visit temples or use community wells, even though the modern Indian law prohibits any discrimination against them Śūdras, especially certain lowermost sub-castes of sūdras, were often treated as sub-humans They were constantly compared to dogs, crows and even worms,[50] and the killing of a sūdra required a penance similar to the one required for the killing of crows, peacocks, frogs, etc [51]

(iii) The most significant difference between sūdras and the three 'upper' classes was the one before the law The concept of equality before the law seems to be unknown to the ancient Aryans While the killing of a brahmana was a 'great (major) sin' (*mahā-pātaka*) or a super (extreme) sin' (*ati-pātaka*) from which no redemption was possible,[52] the killing of persons of the remaining three classes (*varnas*) was but a minor sin The penances for the murder of a member belonging to any of the three remaining classes were prescribed in such a way that the rigour of the penance decreased with the decrease in the class of the victim in the class hierarchy [53]

The Dharmasastras stipulated that if a sūdra committed adultery with a higher caste woman, his organ ought to be cut off, or he ought to be executed But if an 'upper' caste man had adulterous relations with a woman of the same caste, he was only to be fined The fine was reduced further if the woman belonged to any of the 'lower' classes [54] If a sūdra spoke offensively to a brahmana, either his tongue was to be cut off, or pierced with a red hot iron nail, or his mouth and ears were to be filled with burning oil [55] If a sūdra attacked a twice-born, that part of his body which was used for the offence was to be cut off [56] And so on On the other hand, the 'higher' caste Hindus, especially

brāhmanas, were not deemed to be fit for punishment if they injured or even killed a sūdra Only in the case of thefts a 'higher' caste person was sometimes awarded a higher fine But even here Gautama prescribed that if a śūdra stole something, he should be made to pay eightfold the amount of the property stolen, whereas the three 'upper' classes need pay only double the amount in fine [57] A moral code which constantly discriminates against the underprivileged and the down-trodden can hardly claim to represent an ideal social morality

(iv) In all probability, the above picture of the Hindu society's attitude towards sūdras is not wholly true No doubt, sūdras were ill treated and discriminated against, but they were generally not treated cruelly by the caste Hindus The harsh punishments prescribed in the religious texts were probably not carried out in everyday life The prescriptions of Dharmasastras are not obligatory in a strict sense The day-to-day business of the society and decisions in the law courts were generally governed more by local practices, advice of the wise men of the community and the laws and stipulations of such down-to-earth works as the *Arthaśāstra* and later Nibandhas They are definitely less harsh towards the sūdras than the Dharmasastras

The religious texts also advise a considerate and humane treatment of sūdras Śūdras who served in the homes of the 'upper' class Hindus were without doubt treated with consideration and kindness Āpastamba even allows a sūdra servant to cook food [58] All the religious texts emphasize the householder's duty to provide for his sūdra servants According to Āpastamba

"The division of the food must be made in such a manner that those who receive daily portions (servants) do not suffer by it

"At his pleasure he may stint himself, his wife or his children, but by no means a slave who does his work "[59]

Manu gives the same advice that the servants should be fed first before the householder and his wife partake of their food [60] At another place he is even more specific about the duty of the master towards his sūdra servants

"They (the 'upper' class men) must allot to him (a sūdra) out of their own family property a suitable maintenance, after considering his ability, his industry and the number of those he is bound to support "[61]

The above advice may still not be sufficient to counterbalance the generally harsh attitude of the Law-givers towards sūdras. But it does suggest that at the practical level they were mostly treated humanely. The *Rāmāyana* gives several stories of Rāma's dealings with the tribes who inhabited the jungles, such as Nisadas, Vānaras etc. They were definitely sūdras from the orthodox point of view, but Rama always treated them with respect and affection. He even accepted the hospitality of many of them, including Śabarī, the tribal woman. His most faithful servant Hanumān, belonging to the Vanara tribe, has been made into a god by the Hindus.

There were also dissenting voices which asserted that a man's worth must be judged not by his hereditary caste, but by his moral character. Yudhisthira is the chief exponent of this view in the *Mahābhārata*.[62] Such views, even though they are much less frequently expressed than the anti-sūdra feelings, should be taken into account while attempting a general assessment of the ancient Hindu society.

Perhaps due to the influence of Buddhism, there was a general softening of the Hindu society's attitude towards sūdras. Hindu theism also contributed towards a better deal for them, as it affirmed that all those who love God are equal before Him. At the same time, Vaisnavas quite inconsistently emphasized various food taboos which resulted in a further hardening of barriers between 'upper' caste Hindus and sūdras. Thus we find that caste distinctions have been a constant source of tension and disparity between Hindu philosophy and Hindu practice. They have always hampered the emergence of a truly universal social morality. We have caste distinctions even now, though hopefully they will gradually disappear under the impact of industrialization, urbanization and modern Indian law.

IV. The Ideal of Justice and the Preservation of Status quo

(1) Dispensing justice means in Hindu thought arranging matters so as to ensure the victory of *dharma* or *satya* (right or truth) over *adharma* or *asatya* (wrong or untruth). *Dharma* is always considered as a power which preserves, so that if a king or any other person helps in the victory of *dharma* over *adharma*, he

would surely gain well-being, and if he does not take the side of truth, he would be destroyed by his own *adharma* [63] Characteristically, there is no specific word in Sanskrit literature for the modern concept of justice *Dharma*, *vyavahāra* (law suits) and *danda* (punishment) are used to express the idea of justice according to the particular context In spite of this looseness of expression, the Hindu Law-givers were genuinely concerned with justice and related issues

Rendering justice was regarded as the second most important duty of the king, the first being the protection of the masses from external enemies *Daṇḍa* or punishment was seen as the chief instrument of rendering justice, or setting things right in the society The Aryans professed a realistic, or rather cynical view, of man and society According to this view, the human society is governed in its natural state by the law of the survival of the fittest, called *matsya nyāya* (the law of the ocean) It was accepted that when left unchecked, men always indulge in the pursuit of self-interest at the cost of others, which may well lead to a state of anarchy It was, therefore, advised that men should be kept under control and forced to tread the path of righteousness (*dharma*) through a judicious use of punishment [64] All Dharmasastras and Epics hail *danda* as the chief means of preserving *dharma*, and the king as the protector thereof *Dharma* which the king was expected to protect was understood as a just social order But unfortunately this just order was conceived in terms of class hierarchy or *varnāśrama dharma* The king was expected to preserve the caste order He was further expected to use his power of punishment not only against criminals, but also against anyone who dared to overstep the limitations of his class (caste) profession and thereby threatened the stability of the society [65]

The Law-givers have made several suggestions with regard to the dispensing of justice which do them credit For example, it is stipulated that the punishment should be in proportion to the crime, that is, the injury inflicted upon, or the loss incurred by, the victim of offence (*sāhasa*) should determine the nature and amount of punishment [66] It should also be taken into consideration whether the offender of the law is a hardened criminal, or the given instance is his first crime [67] Āpastamba makes a valuable

observation that the man who acts, the one who prompts and the one who helps are equally responsible for the crime [68]

(ii) Theoretically, all were equal before the law and that included the king's relatives and the king himself Manu even opines that a king should be fined a thousand times more than the common man for the same offence [69] But actually, all were definitely not equal before the law Brāhmanas were mostly above the law and sūdras were given a very prejudicial treatment by the law Manu stipulates that the punishments should be awarded strictly in accordance with the relative castes of the offender and the victim [70] The preservation of the *status quo* seems to be the basic motive behind all Dharmasastric stipulations The *status quo* which was sought to be preserved referred not only to class (caste) hierarchy, but also to the class distinction between the rich and the poor A major concern of the Dharmasastras seems to be the protection of the property of the rich The theft of a brahmana's gold was universally regarded as one of the five major sins (*mahā-pātaka*), the other four being murder of a brahmana, adultery with a respectable lady, drinking and association with the above four kinds of criminals Every Smrti also gives another list of crimes that are morally equivalent to the five great sins This list includes theft of certain things like horses, silver, diamond and men as morally equivalent to the stealing of a brahmana's gold [71] Thus, while theft is mentioned twice in the list of grave sins, murder does not find a place even in this second list Murder of anyone, except brahmana males, was unanimously considered a minor sin While very harsh or even cruel penances were prescribed for the four major sins, only mild penances were required for the murder of all women and males of the three classes, other than brahmanas

Not life, but property seems to be the main concern of the Hindu Law-givers Manu's three chapters on king's duties and the administration of justice are primarily concerned with matters relating to property Of the eighteen topics of legal dispute, all but five deal with property, such as rules of inheritance, guidelines for the payment of debts, return of stolen property [72] While no specific punishment is prescribed by him for the murder of human beings, except brahmanas, very harsh punishments are prescribed for various kinds of thefts For example, the thief of a

brahmana's gold was expected to go to the king with a heavy instrument and get himself killed by the king [73] *Vadha* (killing or severe physical punishment) has been prescribed for almost all kinds of thefts Worse still, it was advised that first a thief's hands should be cut off, then he should be executed And a goldsmith who adulterated gold was to be killed by hacking his body to pieces [74]

Of course, violence is also condemned by the authors of the Dharmasāstras from time to time [75] But it does not seem to be the main concern of the Law-givers Perhaps violence was accepted as an integral part of day-to-day life and did not bother them, unless it threatened the stability of the social order At least, it suggests that the ideal of non-violence (*ahimsā*) was not fully integrated into the Hindu social ethos till the time of Dharmasāstras and Epics

As compared to the Dharmasastras, Kautilya's treatment of the subject of punishment for various crimes in his *Arthaśāstra* (between 300 B C to 100 A D) is refreshingly reasonable and liberal While all Dharmasastras prescribe severe physical punishment or even death (*vadha*) for thefts, Kautilya prescribes only various amounts of fines, proportional to the stolen property [76] On the other hand, the use of violence in the society is taken very seriously by Kautilya Capital punishment is prescribed for all murders, and it is advised that more painful forms of death penalty should be given to those men who are guilty of more reprehensible kinds of violence [77] According to Kautilya, only brahmanas were to be exempt from capital punishment, but even they were to be branded on the face, or imprisoned for life, if they indulged in serious crimes of violence [78]

We may say in conclusion that the Hindu social morality and ideal of justice are generally vitiated by the inherent flaw of social discrimination against the 'lower' classes People belonging to different classes (*varnas*) were essentially unequal both in the society and before the law Inter-personal morality was determined by class (caste) distinctions and hierarchy, resulting in grave injustice to the 'lower' classes and an overall undermining of a healthy social or inter-personal morality

V Sex Morality and the Treatment of Women

It is again a very much discussed topic, and yet we have to consider it here, as a people's morality can best be judged by their treatment of weaker classes and the weaker sex

(1) There was a steady deterioration in the condition of women in Hindu society It is a matter of common knowledge that the Aryan women enjoyed considerable freedom and a very respectable position in the Vedic society If we compare the evidence regarding the society's attitude towards women found in the Vedas to the known historical facts about the Hindu society's attitude towards the weaker sex in later middle ages, we would find a world of difference between the two Several factors have been responsible for this negative trend in the Hindu thinking and practice towards women First, the wide-spread practice of polygamy among higher class Aryans was responsible to a considerable extent for the devaluation of the position of women in the society There are even indications of a deplorable practice of giving several maids in gift to an honoured guest, or as dowry to the bridegroom [79] We can hardly expect that women would have been respected and valued as independent persons in a society in which they were viewed as an object of enjoyment, or as something which can be given away as a gift to anyone

Secondly, the later denial of the right to practise the Vedic *dharma* to women resulted in the depreciation of their worth Probably, in the beginning women could perform at least some of the Vedic sacrifices and recite Vedic *mantras* But gradually these rights were denied to them, including the right to undertake the initiation ceremony (*upanayana*) The *Śatapatha Brāhmana* compares women with sūdras, dogs and crows and declares them as personifications of untruth and impurity [80] Very early the idea of ritualistic impurity, from which women were supposed to suffer at certain periods of their life, was used to emphasize the impurity and inferior being of women Thus, all women were reduced to the status of 'once-born' or sūdras Manu contends that since women cannot recite Vedic *mantras*, they are essentially impure or sinful [81] Since all women, irrespective of their class (*varna*), were equal to sūdras, killing a woman came to be accepted as a crime equal to killing a sūdra [82]

Thirdly, the growing importance of rituals, especially the funeral rites, further contributed to the devaluation of women in the Hindu society The importance of sons grew with the importance of obsequial rites which were supposedly essential to ensure a man's eschatological destiny, and which, as we have seen in our second chapter, could be performed only by sons The *Aitareya Brāhmana* gives the story of Hariścandra's desire for a son and justifies it as follows

"The father who looks upon the face of his son, born living to him, discharges his debt in him The son is to him a rescuing boat In him you have the blameless world of heaven The daughter is a sorrow, while the son is light in the highest regions of heaven to his father "[83]

Shakuntala Rao Shastry observes that the growing importance of funeral rites and sons resulted in a proportional devaluation of women in the Vedic and post-Vedic society

"The imperative necessity of a son who could offer oblations dominated the whole sphere of thought Women, who hitherto had a share in the intellectual and religious field, came to be considered as having no purpose in life except that of being the mothers of sons "[84]

Fourthly, the gradual change in the Aryans' attitude towards sex also contributed to the steady deterioration in the condition of women in the society Dhairyabala P Vora has very ably argued for the intimate relation between the growing emphasis on the virginity of women and the deterioration in their social condition [85] It seems that the early Aryans were not very particular about sex mores and a considerable amount of promiscuity in sex relations was tolerated in the society The *Mahābhārata* gives innumerable instances of extra-marital unions Many of the heroes of the Epic were the offsprings of such unions (or *niyoga*) and were gladly accepted by the society

Apparently, there was some disparity between moral norms and actual practice The wise men of the society did not approve of the sexual licence prevalent in the society and condemned it At the same time, they tried to legitimize such unorthodox unions, lest they destabilize the caste-based social structure Thus, the Dharmasastras discuss eight kinds of marriage, the last four being only unions of love or even sexual assault [86] They also

discuss several kinds of progeny, and many of them are nothing but offsprings of extra-marital unions These classifications express the Law-givers' desire to legitimize such issues [87] There is a very curious discussion, found in various sacred books, as to whether the issue of an extra-marital union belongs to the biological father, or to the husband of the mother [88] The fact that this problem is taken seriously suggests that extra-marital unions were quite common Not only was *niyoga* allowed in the case of childless widows,[89] it was practised by women with impotent husbands While all the Law-givers accepted such unions, most of them, at the same time, disapproved of them Thus, we find two opposite opinions regarding *niyoga* in the *Manusmrti* Having admitted the custom of *niyoga*, Manu goes on to condemn it as immoral and against the duty (*dharma*) of the wife to remain loyal to her husband in life and death [90]

There was gradually a new formulation of sex mores Adultery in general was disapproved, and adultery with ladies who deserved one's respect, e g mother, teacher's wife and other immediate relations, came to be regarded as one of the five gravest sins This sin was asserted to be so great that it could be expiated only by a very cruel penance ending in one's death [91] As the Aryans grew more zealous about the chastity of their womenfolk, they put more and more restraints on their freedom and other rights The marriage age of the girls was constantly lowered, till the ridiculous norm was reached that the girl should be married while she is still naked (*nagnikā*) [92] The participation of women in social functions was prohibited, they were expected to live indoors, and were mostly treated as second class citizens

Fifthly, the gradual emergence of a new perception of the world and life by the Hindus, especially in the tradition of liberation, also contributed to the general depreciation of women As we know, the original Aryan ethos was favourably disposed towards both sex and women Sons were welcome and the act of procreation was heralded as a sacrifice Women were viewed as partners-in-life, needed both for enjoyment of life and performance of religio-moral duties But as the Aryan mind matured, it became sensitive to the transience and sufferings of mundane life and began to appreciate the ideal of detachment to, and mental transcendence of, mundane pleasures Pleasure-seeking was

condemned, and it somehow entailed an equal deprecation or condemnation of women Women were perceived by thinkers belonging to the tradition of liberation as the source of all temptations and an obstruction in a man's quest for liberation They were pictured as frivolous and lustful creatures and men were advised to avoid them as a plague Aryans became afraid of getting involved in the world, but instead of controlling their own minds and desires, they preferred to control their womenfolk and condemned them as the cause of men's bondage [93]

The depreciation of women, along with their unjust portrayal as lustful and pleasure-seeking persons, might have originated in the tradition of liberation But it was soon adopted by the thinkers of the Vedic tradition That is how we find that even Dharmasastras and Puranas often speak of women derogatively According to Manu, women are naturally lustful and ever ready to seduce men He adds that they have an unsatiable passion for men, so much so that they are not even bothered as to who their partner is They are frivolous, heartless and full of untruth and malice [94] Manu, therefore, firmly believes that the wife must be carefully guarded by her husband In an oft-quoted piece of advice, various Law-givers and authors of Epics and Puranas agree that a woman must never be left independent She should be under the protective guardianship of either father, husband, or son [95] This steady deterioration in the condition of women seems to have been influenced by two quite different trends within the Hindu 'religio-culture', viz the extreme ritualism of the Brahmanical religion and the world-and-life negation of the tradition of liberation The two religio-moral approaches are diametrically opposed, and yet they apparently combined forces against the weaker sex

Moreover, later Hinduism contains ideas and practices (concerning women) which seem alien to both the above traditions For example, the Hindu ideal of extreme loyalty to one's husband (*pativrata dharma*) cannot be traced to the Vedas Nor can it find any justification in the world-and-life-negating ethos of the tradition of liberation And yet, it is the sixth and probably the most important factor, responsible for the total suppression of women in the Hindu society Manu and other Law-givers never tire of listing the duties of wives towards their husbands All

Dharmasastras, Purānas and Epics are unanimous in declaring that the service of her husband is the only duty (*dharma*) of a woman, and that she would achieve heaven just by scrupulously performing her 'supreme duty'.[96] According to the *Rāmāyana*, a woman should sacrifice her insignificant life (*sic*) for the good of her husband.[97] The wife was expected to remain totally obedient and loyal to her husband and worship him as a god, even if he was full of blemishes.[98] She was to remain loyal to him even after his death. There was no question of the remarriage of the widow or the deserted wife. After her husband's death, or in his absence, a woman was forced to live a life of total deprivation and strictest self-discipline.[99]

The custom of *sati* (self-immolation of the widow) was not very popular in ancient times, though there were occasional cases of self-immolation even then. The *Dharmaśāstras* have discussed the ideal mode of conduct of the widow, as also the rules of inheritance of the family property by her in the absence of any male issue. They even allowed the widow to have a son through *niyoga* or intercourse with a man appointed by the elders for that purpose. All this means that they expected the widow to live in the society after her husband's death. The practice of *sati* gained popularity during middle ages only. There is no doubt that it was the religio-social pressure that forced most of the widows to accept this ghastly end. For the last one hundred and fifty years the custom of *sati* has been legally banned. But even now we occasionally have cases of *sati*, and always the instance is highlighted by a great fanfare. Once she is burnt, she is declared a *sati* and people gather round the place to get their desires fulfilled! It is sad how religious dogmas can turn normal good-natured human beings into blood-thirsty brutes.

(ii) But the above is only one side of the medal. Those thinkers, who are very critical of the treatment meted out to women in the Hindu society, generally quote selected passages from the texts which seem to support their own one-sided version of the issue, while completely ignoring other equally relevant passages. Thus, we find an altogether different approach towards women, alongside the one discussed above, in all religious texts, from the Vedas to the Dharmasastras and Purānas.

As is well-known, women enjoyed quite a respectable position

in the Vedic society Girls married late and they even participated in philosophical debates and other social functions Of course, the main field of work for woman was recognized to be the hearth and home, but there she enjoyed maximum freedom and power There are beautiful marriage hymns in Vedas expressing hope for a life of togetherness and sharing for the married couple One hymn blesses the bride, saying that she may rule over her husband's household, including the parents-in-law and servants [100] And there are hardly any injunctions to the wife for the practice of extreme loyalty towards her husband (*pativrata dharma*) which are so common in later Hindu texts

Not only did Hinduism originate in the Vedas, the central Hindu ethos is even now Vedic to a large extent That is how we find quite positive sentiments regarding women in all Hindu texts Women of all four classes are declared unslayable and worthy of protection in almost all religious texts Manu equates the murder of a woman to that of a brahmana or a child and declares it as the greatest crime, from which no redemption is possible [101] It is also gratifying to note that the Aryans held the male partner responsible for any adulterous relation and tried to minimize the guilt of the female At one place the *Mahābhārata* gives a passionate plea in defence of women who are involved in such extra-marital relations According to it, women hardly go in for such relations, unless they are tempted and misguided by men [102] In cases of adultery the Dharmasastras prescribe very harsh punishments and penances for men All men, excepting brahmanas could be given capital punishment for adultery, especially if the woman was an unwilling partner [103] The king was expected to protect the victim of a sexual assault and return her to her family after she had performed the prescribed penance [104]

Unlike man, an adulterous woman was asked to undergo very easy penances, after which she was declared to be fit to be accepted by her family and society [105] It was also stipulated that the fallen woman must be given refuge in the house and provided with food and shelter [106] Both Manu and Yajñavalkya chivalrously declare that a woman does not need any purificatory rites, as she is always pure [107] All Dharmasastras recognize certain rights of women, including their right over their personal property [108]

Significantly, Kautilya is much more liberal and considerate

towards the fair sex than the authors of Dharmasāstras, probably because his views are based on practical considerations and not on religious bias He allows considerable portion of the family property as the personal property of women (*stri-dhana*) But his real revolutionary views are regarding the compensation to be paid to the wife in case the husband marries again, and the remarriage of the widows and the deserted wives Kautilya prescribes that a woman is free to remarry after waiting for a short period (varying from a few months to two years) for a husband who has gone to foreign lands [109] Other Law-givers like Nārada have also allowed the remarriage of widows, especially those whose marriage has not been consummated

True, it was a men's world and women had to live under the constant protection of their men-folk, but there were repeated admonitions for husbands, fathers and sons to look after their female relations well and to keep them well satisfied [110] According to the *Mahābhārata*, the husband is called *bhartā* (protector and provider), but that man is no more a *bhartā* who does not provide for his wife [111] The emphasis on the duties of the wife was sought to be counterbalanced by the emphasis on the duties of the husband Manu points out that women are like the goddess Laksmī, as they bring prosperity to the household According to him, women are essential for the welfare of the family, for they give birth to children, bring them up, serve the elders of the family and look after the entire household and all socio-religious customs Above all, a wife is a must for the proper fulfilment of a man's religious duties [112] Though the ancient Hindus often practised polygamy, the practice was never encouraged by the Hindu religious texts The Dharmasastras even sought to safeguard the interests of the wife by stipulating conditions under which alone a man may remarry And deserting a wife is declared a serious crime [113]

Mothers are the most respected and loved persons in Hindu homes In an oft-quoted passage, Manu declares the mother to be the one deserving greatest respect, much more than either the father or the teacher [114] According to Āpastamba, a mother should be served properly, even if she has become a fallen woman [115] Hindu thinkers and writers have been eloquent in their

praise of the mother who symbolises unselfish love, tender care and willingness for utmost self-sacrifice [116]

The Vedic religion should be given the credit for the high position of women in family life Only the householder with a wife could maintain the family fire and perform sacrifices The recognition of their worth in the family life gave the Indian women moral strength and self-respect Whenever our legendary heroines were mistreated by their spouses, they rose valiantly in self-defence and scoffed at their tormentors The personalities of Sītā, Damayantī, Śakuntala and Sāvitrī outshine those of their spouses In the hour of crisis all of them showed a ready intelligence, a very strong moral character and a determination to get back what was most dear to them True, these ladies were also the epitomes of the conventional ideal of loyalty to one's husband (*pativrata dharma*), and their mental horizons would seem limited to a modern reader But they all married of their free choice, knew their duties and rights and in general asserted themselves remarkably well, and can in no way be considered as the poor weaker sex

At first glance the two viewpoints, regarding the nature and worth of women, discussed above, seem diametrically opposed If they had come from different writers, or had been professed during different periods of Hindu history, it would have been easy to understand or evaluate them But it is not so Both the viewpoints and their concomitant attitudes towards women are found side by side in all Hindu works, from the *Manusmṛti* to *Mahābhārata* and Puranas A few passages in some works might be later interpolations But generally, both kinds of description of women, their nature and worth represent the views of the author of a given text It is so, because most Hindu thinkers have an ambivalent attitude towards women and look upon them from two or three very different perspectives From the point of view of worldly pleasures (*kāma*) which was symbolized by women for the Aryans, they were deprecated and condemned as obstacles in the path of spiritual quest From the point of view of *dharma* (comprehending both religion and morality), they were seen as wives and mothers and were well respected (Even now the Hindu masses cherish the image of women as mothers) But from the point of view of ritualistic purity they were again deprecated This last is unfor-

tunate, as the ritualistic tradition is an integral part of the Vedic tradition which is otherwise very positive and affirmative in its approach to world and life

VI The Pivotal Position of Family in the Hindu Social Morality

Manu presents a very charming picture of the Hindu family According to him, a man is incomplete without his wife and son [117] And wife and husband should always be together in the performance of all their religio-moral duties (*dharma*), the aim being that they should never be separated from each other [118] According to Āpastamba, there can be no division or separation between husband and wife, either in the enjoyment of prosperity, or in the performance of duties They share everything, including the merits of their acts [119] The key to marital happiness, according to Manu, is mutual consideration and affection

"The welfare of that family is always secure wherein the woman is always satisfied with the man and the man with the woman "[120]

Hindu family has been a very harmonious and homogeneous whole from time immemorial, and though the external circumstances changed with time, they did not touch the Hindu family which has remained the backbone of Hindu society A salient point of Hindu morality has been the pivotal place of family in a person's life Man's primary duty is always towards his family Manu has stipulated that though charity (*dāna*) is of highest merit, it should be practised only after ensuring the needs of the entire family, including those of the servants [121]

The family is the most basic unit of the Aryan culture, even castes developed afterwards An average Indian (Hindu) family usually consists of parents, their sons and their families The old are not only very well cared after in India, they have a very important say in the lives of the younger generation Man is supposed to be born with three debts, the first being towards his parents The concept of one's debt to, and the concomitant value of care and service of, one's parents are unique to the Indian culture It is said that the parents not only give birth to and bring up the children, they are also the children's true well-wishers, friends

in need and guides in moral matters (*dharma*) The debt one incurs to one's parents is so great that one can never be free from it [122] Parents, therefore, deserve life-long service and obedience. The teacher is the third person who has been unanimously regarded as deserving enormous respect and obedience Manu rhetorically affirms that respect and service of the above three is the greatest duty of a man, and all other duties are secondary to it [123]

The householder and his wife should not only serve their parents, they should be equally kind and considerate towards their dependents All Smrtis stipulate that the daughters and daughters-in-law, especially the pregnant ones, should be given food before everybody else, and that the couple should take food after feeding everybody, from the guests to the servants [124] The Epics describe, both in theory and by way of example, the ideal interrelationships between different members of the family in the context of real life situations The attitude and conduct of different characters of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* express a very high level of self-restraint and inter-personal morality For example, though unjustly treated by his step mother, Rāma never once showed disrespect towards her Even though Rāma's mother, Kausalya had to suffer the separation of her only son due to Kaikeyī, she never condemned her The relationship between Sītā and Rama was one of love, companionship and mutual concern And the mutual brotherly love of the four step-brothers of the *Rāmāyana* is a thing of pleasure to read

The Hindu families are built on the solid foundation of mutual consideration and duty The reason for the exceptional harmony in a Hindu family lies in the fact that the couple enter into wedlock, not as independent individuals whose sole commitment lies towards each other, but as members of a family who are responsible for the welfare of the entire family There are very few orphanages and hardly any old age homes in India Old relatives and small children are very well looked after in Indian joint families After the demise of the father or mother, the eldest brother or sister still takes up the place of the late parent and brings up the younger brothers and sisters as one's own children In cities these large families are breaking up for several socio-economic reasons, but they still exist in the villages and small towns Even if the

families are not very large nowadays, one's parents are always considered an integral part of the family unit and never left uncared for

The most important moral virtues, like self-restraint, kindness, unselfishness and the habit of sharing one's possessions with others, are learnt and practised in Hindu joint families The Hindu joint family has thus been the foundation of the entire superstructure of the society

VII Social Responsibilities of the Individual

(1) The key concept of Hindu socio-moral thought is *dharma*, meaning righteousness or duty There is no discussion of men's rights (with the exception of those of brahmanas) in the entire Dharmasastric literature If ever the Law-givers wanted to discuss the rights of some class of persons (rights of the individuals were never discussed), they would discuss them as the duties of another class of persons towards the given class Thus, the rights of the masses are attended to not as rights, but as duties of the king The rights of the husband were guaranteed by emphasizing the duties of the wife, and those of the wife were assured by insisting on the duties of the husband Even the rights of the widows, issueless women and orphans were taken care of, but only in the form of duties, either of the members of the family or of the king [125]

Here we may contrast Hindu social philosophy with Western social thought The basic emphasis in the Western thought is on the rights of the individual, and his duties are mostly conceived negatively as non-interference in the enjoyment of similar rights by other members of the society But in Indian (Hindu) thought the basic emphasis is always on duties, and these duties are mostly conceived positively, requiring positive effort on the part of the individual towards the well-being of other members of the society

Another important difference between the two approaches, the Western and the Indian, is in their respective conceptions of the relation between the individual and the society Broadly speaking, the Western social philosophy regards the individual as the basic unit of the society This individual is an autonomous

self and is free to pursue his personal goals and live his own life At the same time, he has very definite obligations towards the society And the relations of the individual with the society as a whole are non-mediate or direct On the other hand, the Hindu social thought does not usually consider man in his capacity as an autonomous self It is not the individual, but the class or group which is generally the main referent of all socio-moral norms and values The individual's rights in and his duties towards the society are determined on the basis of the class to which he may belong The various classes are defined in terms of either hereditary caste, sex or stage of life

While the three classes of student-celibates, forest-dwellers and renunciants did not have many social responsibilities, the class of householders was conceived in a thoroughly social context This class of householders included the members of all the four classes (*varnas*), so that the duties of householders, such as providing for one's family, earning one's livelihood righteously and giving magnanimously, are more or less coextensive with the entire Hindu social morality A householder was expected to provide not only for his family, but for all who needed food and succour This included the student-celibates who compulsorily begged for food, guests who were temporarily in need of food and shelter, brāhmanas or teachers who usually did not have any other source of income, and renunciants It has been unanimously agreed that the life of a householder is the support (*āsraya*) of all human beings belonging to the other three stages of life Manu compares the life of a householder to the life-sustaining air (*prāna vāyu*), and the *Mahābhārata* compares it to the mother who cares for and looks after the welfare of her children All living beings are similarly supported or looked after by the householder And hence the conclusion, that the order of the householder is the best of the four orders [126]

As we know, a man is said to be born with various debts (*rna*) His first debt is to the Vedic teachers which is symbolic of man's indebtedness to the entire religio-cultural heritage His second debt is to his ancestors which affirms the value of life and procreation And his third debt is to the gods to whom he owes his life [127] He is also indebted to entire mankind and all other living beings. This affirms man's solidarity with all his fellow humans and the

entire creation The concept of man's indebtedness to the society and the entire creation is perhaps the most positive and morally meaningful concept, ever developed in the history of ethical thought It is asserted that each man owes his life to his parents, teachers and society, and that he must live in a way so as to be able to repay his debts to them The debt to parents can be repaid, as we have seen, by serving them and continuing the family line through procreation The debt to teachers can be repaid by the regular study of Vedas And the debt to human beings or society has to be repaid by feeding guests and helping anyone in need of help and succour According to this tradition, even the quest of one's liberation cannot be undertaken without first fulfilling all one's socio-moral obligations,[128] especially those towards one's immediate relations

The life of the householder is thus oriented towards the well-being of the society (*lokahita* or *lokasamgraha*) Though the householder is supposedly free to pursue the values of pleasure or desire-fulfilment (*kāma*) and prosperity (*artha*), in fact it is the value of righteousness (*dharma*) that is expected to govern his entire life Utmost self-restraint and dedication to duty are expected from him The concept of the ideal householder is unique in Hindu thought It seeks to include and synthesize the two sets of values, viz those relating to the enjoyment of the world and those concerned with self-discipline There is an overwhelming emphasis on duties and self-abnegation in the Hindu ideal of the householder

The householder is constantly held responsible towards the society The twin duties of charity (*dāna*) and entertaining the guests (*atithi-satkāra*) express the individual's obligation towards the society While magnanimity has been one of the most cherished values of the Aryan ethos, hospitality became obligatory because of being included in the five daily sacrifices As we have seen, a householder was expected to feed each and every person who came to him A text, common to both the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Manusmṛti*, says that one who cooks food for the purpose of sacrifice (which includes offering food to the gods and all living beings) eats well, but one who cooks for himself eats in sin [129] Roderick Hindery has pointed out that charity (*dāna*) was understood in Vedas as sharing one's food and wealth with others, he seems to

imply that this sense of sharing is lost in later Hinduism [130] But it is not so The obligatory duty of feeding the guests, as affirmed in later Hinduism, is nothing but sharing one's food with others Sharing one's wealth with others (*samvibhāga*) is a virtue often included in the description of an ideal man [131] The *Mahābhārata* advises that one should spend one-third portion of one's income for religio-moral duties (*dharma*) which include both ritualistic acts (*ista*) like sacrifices and philanthropic acts (*pūrta*) like digging wells, planting trees etc [132] We have seen in the previous chapter that the ritualistic tradition does not give any importance to philanthropic acts, but these are highly valued by popular religious texts

At first, the chief beneficiaries of both charity and hospitality were brāhmanas As brāhmanas were forbidden to teach for fees, the society acknowledged its responsibility to look after their material needs The custom of giving liberally to brāhmanas expresses a high regard for knowledge and a desire to keep education within the reach of all deserving students Later on the weak, the old and the homeless were also included, along with the renunciants, in the category of the persons deserving charity Brāhmanas were still regarded as the most deserving recipients of charity, but the popular tradition affirmed that in addition to brahmanas all those who are in need of food and shelter deserve help and charity

Giving food and shelter to guests is one of the most important traditional duties of a householder In ancient times receiving a guest was an elaborate social ritual The guest was not only given food and shelter, he was elaborately received and honoured [133] Though generally the guest was either a brahmana or a respected relative, the Dharmasāstras stipulate that anyone who comes after a householder has performed the *Vaiśvadeva* sacrifice should be given food If he is a sūdra or even an untouchable (*cāndāla*), he should be given food after taking some work from him [134] It is agreed that food should be given to all, except men of immoral character, some opine that even these should be given uncooked food Thus, to feed all in need of nourishment is the most sacred duty of every householder And nothing is ever expected in return

(ii) A man is held responsible towards the society in more than one way He is not only expected to fulfil all his obligations

towards his fellow beings, he is also held accountable to the society for his conduct Hindu legislators prescribe the ouster of the individual sinner from the society They even stipulate that the offenders of moral code must not be associated with in any manner Significantly, the rule of the individual's accountability to the society applies to all men, belonging to any stage of life Though student-celibates, forest-dwellers and renunciants were not expected to engage in any socially useful work, they were strictly accountable to the society for their conduct Rather, breach of moral code by any one of them was regarded as much more serious than an equivalent lapse by a householder

In order to expiate for his sins, a sinner was expected to willingly undertake certain prescribed penances (*prāyaścitta*) The penance for each act of breach of moral code was decided by a group of village elders, to whom the offender was expected to report his crime The prescribed penance was to be in accordance with the gravity of the offence Sometimes the capacity of the sinner was also taken into consideration Penance is one of the most discussed topics in the Dharmasāstras and later Nibandhas (commentaries) A distinction is also made between voluntary and involuntary, major and minor sins According to Yajñavalkya, a penance cannot expiate a sin, but can make one worthy of social intercourse,[135] implying that one becomes unworthy of social intercourse the moment one commits a sin The *Mitākṣarā* explains this statement by pointing out that all sins have two kinds of effects—securing punishment in hell for the evil-doer and ouster of the sinner by the society [136] A social outcaste was expected not only to live by begging, but also to loudly pronounce his sin to the society while begging [137] Confessing one's sin before the society requires real moral courage and must have had tremendous purgatory value

The Hindu texts have persistently tried to instil in the individual the idea of his being organically related to the society Nothing pertaining to the life of the individual is exclusively his personal concern Nowhere is this social bias more prominent than in the context of moral sin Sin is neither a mere personal affair which can be confessed to a priest in private and done away with, nor a mere legal offence, punishable by the state It is not even a moral offence, or a breach of *dharma* alone which will be punished

in the other world Rather, it is mainly a social offence The individual forefeits his right of social membership by his moral offence, which means that the individual's membership of the society is based on the condition of his adhering to the path of *dharma* The whole system very effectively affirms the accountability of the individual towards the society A positive aspect of this tradition is that the individual is willingly accepted back into the society after performing due penance Manu contends that the society should not keep any contact with the unrepentant sinner, but adds that a man who has duly repented for his sin by performing the prescribed penance must never be humiliated by reminding him of his past crime [138]

The above concept of man's accountability to the society is not formally developed in Indian thought, but is implied in various injunctions against association with the sinners Even the concept of society is not properly defined Mostly it means either the caste or the village community Even today village assemblies (*pañcāyatas*) are organized on the basis of caste In fact, the concept of a nation or society as a whole is hardly found in the ancient literature There may be several reasons for this First, the ethical deliberations of ancient Hindu thinkers were largely governed by pragmatic considerations like the stability and harmonious functioning of the social order Most of the Hindu socio-moral thought thus comes to us in the form of simple commands and statements, approving or disapproving certain forms of conduct, and we hardly ever find any deliberate effort at systematic thinking Secondly, it seems that the leaders and thinkers of Hindu society were very conscious of the fact that it was constituted by several heterogeneous 'religio-cultural' (racial) groups Eager to accommodate all of them within Hindu society, they neglected to develop a comprehensive concept of society As a result, the potentially cogent idea of the individual's accountability to the society could not be given any worthwhile socio-moral content

Since the individual was accountable to the society for his moral conduct, he was often asked to undergo some penance as a token of repentance for every breach of religio-moral laws This gave a tool in the hands of society, especially the priestly class, to victimize and harass the simple poor folk New petty sins were invented and the poor people's hard earned money was extracted from

them in the name of expiation of sins Thus, giving food to the whole community, earlier a symbolic act of re-entry into the community, was required on every occasion of some petty ritualistic offence All pretence to moral relevance was given up Crossing the sea, or killing or injuring a cow became very important sins Village assemblies (*pañcāyatas*) have always played a very important role in the Indian life As times changed, these assemblies became the strongholds of all that was conservative and reactionary in the Hindu society Its members, being very old, always resisted, and still do, any change desired by the younger generation This is perhaps an inevitable, though very unfortunate, by-product of the system

VIII Some Concluding Observations

The Hindu social morality, like everything Hindu, or rather like everything human, is a very complex phenomenon On the one hand, the entire Hindu ethos centres round the concept of *dharma* or righteousness, and the Hindu social structure is based on the firm foundation of a harmonious family life The individual is not lost in an impersonal social organization, so that his interests are much better safeguarded in the Indian (Hindu) social order The individual belongs to a family and sub-caste and is never forsaken during the times of adversity Specially, the welfare of the weaker sections of society, e g the old, the women and the orphaned children, is much better ensured in the Hindu social organization than anywhere else in the world

Hindu socio-moral thought contains several very valuable ideas which have been the cause of the stability of the Hindu social organization and the basis or source of a relatively quite high level of inter-personal morality in the Hindu society through its long history We refer here to—i) The idea of man's being born with several debts to various members of the society, as also to all his fellow beings, and the need to repay these debts by discharging all his responsibilities towards others, ii) The universal emphasis on the duties, instead of the rights, of the individual, iii) The equal emphasis on self-restraint and self-denial to be practised by the householder in order to be better able to perform all his socio-moral duties, iv) The value of sharing the goods of life with one's

fellow-beings, as enshrined in the virtues of charity and hospitality which are practised even now, and v) The accountability of every member of the society to the latter for his moral conduct The above ideas have never been systematically presented in Hindu works But together they form a highly valuable integrated approach to social or inter-personal morality The basic idea of Hindu socio-moral thought seems to be that man is a social animal, a product of his family and society, so that his life and conduct can never be his personal concern alone Man's socio-moral behaviour, therefore, must be determined by his place and role in the society, as well as by the needs of those around him If properly developed, this idea can provide a valuable basis for a healthy, positive social morality

On the other hand, all Hindu ideals of *dharma* (righteousness), justice and social harmony are permanently vitiated by its basic assumption of the inequality of men The division of society into hereditary, exclusive and hierarchically arranged classes (castes), as also the determination of all social relations and even justice by class considerations are expressions of the above assumption Apart from the injustice of treating half of the population as sūdras or even untouchables, the structuring of the society into separate castes with specific duties has created insurmountable barriers between man and man

The existence of the joint families and the division of the society into castes and sub-castes are interrelated Both express the ethos in which the individual is not seen as an independent unit of society, but as a member of some bigger unit, a family or a caste Till recently the individual's relations with the society were generally mediated through his caste community or *pañcāyata* The latter exercised considerable control over the conduct of the individuals belonging to that particular caste or sub-caste and ensured that the individual did not overreach his limits and harm the interests of the society Now, when the caste order and village communities are disintegrating due to the impact of industrialization and urbanization, the individual finds himself in direct relation with the society It may well be that the Hindu socio-cultural tradition has not prepared the individual well to shoulder his responsibilities towards the society directly An Indian (Hindu) usually feels himself solely responsible towards his family and

close with his clan (sub-caste), so that he often unintentionally indulges in acts which are detrimental to the larger interests of the society

Changing times have transformed the Hindu society, but in the process the entire Hindu social structure is put to great strain Most Hindus have retained their religion, but are no more as keen on ancient socio-moral values which seem to them to come in the way of their newly acquired craze for modern ways and material comforts There is an urgent need, therefore, to present the Hindu philosophy of morals to the people in such a way that it can provide a basis for a meaningful social morality suited to the needs of modern times As we shall see in our VIIth chapter *infra,* this would require a reconstruction of Hindu philosophy of morals, and such a reconstruction is both desirable and possible in Hindu thought

NOTES

1 *Mbh Śān P* CX 11, cf ibid XCI 5
2 *M S* II 6-8, IV 178, VII 46, *Āpast D S* I 7 20 7-8
3 *Āpast D S* I 1 1 1-3
4 See *History* (1973), vol III, pp 825-826, 856 ff
5 *M S* I 85-86, VIII 41
6 *Gaut D S* XI 20
7 *Yajñ S* I 343, II 192, also see *History*, vol III, pp 859-863
8 *M S* IV 1-2, VI 1, 38, 88, 93-97
9 *Mbh Śan P* LXI 2-7
10 *Āpast D S* II 9 21 1, 8 ff, 18 ff, *Gaut D S* III 2, 11 ff, 26 ff
11 *M S* VI 39 ff
12 *Mbh Śan P* VII 36 ff, IX 4 ff, 12 ff
13 *Āpast D S* I 2 5 9 to I 2 8 30
14 *M S* VI 8, 44-48
15 *M S* III 77-78, *Mbh Śan P* VIII 6 ff, 13 ff, XII 11 ff
16 *Gaut D S* III 36
17 *M S* IV 138 ff
18 Ibid, I 87 ff, X 74 ff, 100, 121-123, *B G* XVIII 41 ff
19 *M S* X 95-100
20 *Mbh Anuś P* chs XXVIII to XXX, especially XXVIII 4, 27, 28, XXX 5-7
21 *History* (1974), vol II, pp 23-24
22 *Rg Veda* X 90
23 *B G* IV 13
24 Ibid III 33, XVIII 41

25 Ibıd III 35, XVIII 45-47
26 *M S* X 97
27 *B G* III 21-25
28 *Hıstory*, vol II , pp 25 ff
29 *M S* IV 210 ff
30 Ibıd X 25-30
31 *Śatapatha Brahmana* II 2 2 6
32 *M S* I 93-96, IX 316-319, XI 83-84
33 *Mbh Śan P* LVI, 12-13, LX 40-42, *Anuś P* XXX 4-6, XXXII 25 ff, XXXIII 4-6, LXXVI 4, 13 etc
34 *M S* VIII 270-272, IX 248
35 Ibıd IV 165-169
36 *Gaut D S* VIII 12-13
37 *M S* II 135, *Āpast D S* I 4 14 25
38 *M S* IX 319
39 Ibıd II 157-172, III 128 ff , *Mbh Śan P* XXXVII 34 ff
40 *Āpast D S* I 3 9 9-11, *Gaut D S* XII 4-6
41 *Ramayana, Uttara Kanda*, ch 24, (1978, p 603)
42 *Ś B* , *Br S* 1 3 34-38, ref to *Gaut D S* XII 4-5
43 *M S* X 122-123
44 *Vıṣnu Purana*, bk VI, ch 2, (1972, pp 491-492)
45 *M S* VIII 415-417
46 Ibıd VIII 413-414
47 Ibıd IV 80, *Āpast D S* I 11 31 22
48 *Āpast D S* II 1 2 8-9
49 *M S* X 50 ff
50 Ibıd III 92, *Āpast D S* II 4 9 5
51 *M S* XI 131-132, *Āpast D S* I 9 25 13
52 *M S* XI 54, *Āpast D S* I 9 24 7, 24-25
53 *M S* XI 127-131
54 Ibıd VIII 359, 362 ff , 374 ff , *Apast D S* II 10 27 8-9, *Gaut D S.* XII 2-3
55 *M S* VIII 270 272, *Āpast D S* II 10 27 14-16
56 *M S* VIII 279-283, *Gaut D S* XII 1
57 *Gaut D S* XII 15-16
58 *Āpast D S* II 2 3 4
59 Ibıd II 4 9 10-11
60 *M S* III 116
61 Ibıd X 124
62 *Mbh Āran P* CLXXVII 16 ff, CCVI 11-13
63 *M S* VIII 14-18, 82-85, 127-128
64 *Ibıd* VII 14 ff , 20-22,, *Mbh Śan P* XV 2 ff
65 *M S* VII 35, VIII 172, X 96, *Arthaśastra*, bk I , ch 3, (1967, p 7)
66 *M S* VIII 285 ff
67 Ibıd VIII 126-129
68 *Āpast D S* II 11 29 1
69 *M S* VIII 335-336

70 Ibid VIII 267 ff, 359, 366 ff
71 Ibid XI 55-59
72 Ibid VIII 4-7
73 Ibid VIII 314-315, XI 99-101
74 Ibid VIII 321 ff, IX 270 ff, 292
75 Ibid VIII 345-346
76 *Arthaśāstra*, bk III, ch. 17, (1967, pp 219-220)
77 Ibid, bk III, ch 19, (pp 222-223), bk IV, ch II, (pp 259-261)
78 Ibid, bk IV, ch 8, (p 252)
79 *Mbh Śan P* XXIX 58-59
80 *Śatapatha Brahmaṇa* XIV 1 1 31
81 *M S* IX 18
82 *Āpast D S* I 9 24 5, *Gaut D S* XXII 17
83 *Aitareya Brahmana* VIII 13-18, quoted in Cromwell Crawford, op cit, p 43
84 *Women in the Vedic Age* (1952), p 69
85 *Evolution of Morals in the Epics* (1959), pp 35 ff, 46 ff, 63 ff
86 *M S* III 20-35
87 Ibid III 37-40, 173-175, IX 120-125, 138 ff
88 Ibid IX 32-44, *Gaut D S* XVIII 11-14
89 *M S* IX 59-63, *Gaut D S* XVIII 4-11
90 *M S* IX 64-65
91 *Ibid* XI 104-105
92 *Gaut D S* XVIII 21-23
93 *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, *Vairagya Khanda*, chs XII and XXII, (1978, vol I, pp 45 ff, 77 ff)
94 *M S* IX 13-18, cf *Mbh Anuś P* XXXVIII 11 ff, XXXIX 4 ff, etc.
95. *M S* V 147-149, IX 2-3, *Yajñ S* I 85
96 *M S* V 155, IX 29, cf *Mbh Anuś P* XLVI 12
97. *Ramayana, Uttara Kanda*, ch XV (1978, p 592)
98 *M S* V 153, 166
99 Ibid V 156-158, IX 75
100 *Rg Veda* X 85, quoted in *Women in the Vedic Age* (1952), p 17
101. *M S* VIII 359, XI 191
102 *Mbh Śan P* CCLVIII 34-38
103 *M S* VIII 359, 364-366
104 *Āpast D S* II 10 26 21-24
105 Ibid II 10 27 1, *Yajñ S* I 72, *Mbh Śan P* XXXVI 18, 26-27
106. *M S* XI 189
107 Ibid V 130, *Yajñ S* I 71-72
108. *M S* III 52, VIII 29, IX 192-196
109 *Arthasastra*, bk III, chs 2 to 4, (pp 174 ff)
110 *M S* III 55-61, IX 95
111 *Mbh San P* CCLVIII 35
112 *M S* IX 27-28
113 *M S* IX 72-79, *Āpast D S* I 10 28 19
114 *M S* II 145, cf *Vasistha Dharmasūtra* XIII 48, *Mbh San P* CIX 15-16, *Anuś P* CVIII 14-15

115 *Āpast D S* I 10 28 9
116 *Mbh Śan P* CCLVIII 24 ff
117 *M S* IX 45
118 Ibid IX 95-96, 101-102
119 *Āpast D S* II 6 14 16-19
120 *M S* III 60
121 Ibid XI 7-10
122 Ibid II 227
123 Ibid II 225-237, cf *Mbh Śan P* CIX 3 ff, 17-18
124 *M S* III 114-118
125 Ibid VIII 27-29
126 *M S* III 77-80, VI 89-90, *Mbh Śan P* XI 15 ff, XII 6 ff
127 *Taittirīya Samhita* VI 3 10 5, quoted in M Hiriyanna, *Indian Conception of Values* (1960) p 151
128 *M S* VI 35-37, *Mbh Śan P* XXV 6, XXVIII 54, CCLXI 15, CCLXXXI 9-11
129. *B G* III 9-13, *M S* III 115-118
130 *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions* (1974), pp 45 ff
131 *Mbh Śan P* XXI 11, LX 7-8 etc
132 Ibid, *Anuś P* CXXIX 16-19
133 *Āpast D S* II 3 6 5 to II 3 7 17
134 *Ibid* II 2 4 13, 19-20, *M S* III 112
135 *Yajñ S* III 226
136 *Mitaksarā* on ibid
137 *M S* XI 73, *Āpast D S* I 9 24 10-11
138 *M S* XI 190

CHAPTER IV

LIBERATION-CENTRIC MORALITY OF THE TRADITION OF KNOWLEDGE

I Morality of Liberation (*Moksa*) Opposed Both to the Ritualistic and Social Moralities

We have discussed in our earlier chapters the ritualistic and social moralities of the Vedic-Dharmaśastric tradition The two moralities are intimately related and together form the way of action (*karma-mārga*) Hinduism contains another very important religio-philosophical tradition, that of the quest of liberation The tradition of liberation incorporates in it both the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*) and the way of turning-away-from-the world (*nivrtti-mārga*), as expressed in the creed of world renunciation (*samnyāsa*) Liberation is expected to be realized through the metaphysical knowledge (*jñāna*) which in its turn necessarily implies a turning away from the world The goal of liberation and the morality associated with it have been developed in conscious contradistinction to the first or Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition As we know, both religio-moral conduct (*dharma*) and knowledge (*darsana*) are generally valued in Hinduism as means of achieving human goal(s) While the ritualistic morality of the Vedic tradition is mostly recommended as a means of achieving prosperity here and heaven hereafter, its social morality is formulated with the specific goal of preserving the stability of the social order Presumably, if the goal changed, the morality would change too

In the beginning itself Upanisads declared the Vedic sacrifices as totally irrelevant for the realization of liberation (*moksa*)

"Frail indeed are those rafts of sacrifices, conducted by eighteen persons, upon which rests the inferior work, therefore thev are destructible Fools who rejoice in them as the highest good fall victim again and again to old age and death "[1]

Not only did the Upanisadic seers condemn Vedic sacrifices, they also affirmed even philanthropic or humanitarian works as

equally irrelevant to the quest of liberation, because the mortal cannot lead one to the Immortal.[2] At the same time, having declared the futility of mundane pursuits as a means of realizing liberation, Yajñavalkya, the most prominent Upanisadic seer, did not give up all actions, and even claimed the prize of cows.[3] In fact, Upanisads, *Bhagavadgitā* and *Brahma Sūtra* recommend a synthesis of the way of action with the way of knowledge.[4] They emphasize that the ritualistic and social duties must not be abandoned, and contend that the performance of duties can be continued along with the practice of the way of knowledge.[5]

On the other hand, Advaita Vedantins categorically deny the usefulness of the path of action for a seeker of liberation, as well as the desirability or even the possibility of an active life for a man of liberation. Samkhyas likewise condemn Vedic ritualism and affirm that the knowledge of the metaphysical truth alone can liberate a man from the bondage of transmigratory existence. This search for liberation is generally understood as *nivrtti-mārga* and contrasted to the *pravrtti-mārga* of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition. *Pravrtti* means inclination towards the external world or the outgoing tendency of the senses and mind. Both the ritualistic and social moralities, as developed in the Dharmasastras, express the *pravrtti-mārga* at its best, in that they affirm the values of this world which is both real and worthwhile for them. On the other hand, liberation (*moksa*) is generally conceived as a transcendent state, totally unrelated to the three Dharmasastric values (*trivarga*) of righteousness (*dharma*, conceived often in ritualistic terms), prosperity (*artha*) and pleasure (*kāma*). While the pursuance of the three values requires the direction of the human mind outwards, the search for liberation requires a complete breaking away of the mind from the outer world and its direction towards the innermost reality of self, culminating in the total absorption of the former (mind) into the latter (self). This is the *nivrtti-mārga* which seeks to forcefully curb the outgoing tendency of the human mind and is supposed to be the *sine qua non* of self-realization or *moksa*. It is contended by Śamkara that the pursuit of the three goals (*trivarga*) and that of liberation are entirely unrelated, and the teachings regarding the way of knowledge and that of action are meant for two distinct classes of persons. It is so because the two, knowledge and action, are mutually

opposed, so that a man cannot simultaneously devote himself to both [6]

The tradition of liberation or *nivrtti-mārga* is, of course, primarily concerned with man's quest of liberation (*moksa*) Man is constantly exhorted to seek his individual liberation and not worry about his other socio-moral obligations It is even asserted that a man need not wait to take up the quest of liberation till he has reached the last stage of renunciation (*samnyāsa-āśrama*), instead, he can take up renunciation whenever the desire for liberation is aroused in his heart [7] In contrast, the philosophy and world-view associated with the *pravrtti-mārga* of Vedas and Dharmasastras, as we have seen, is socio-centric and stresses that a man must repay all his debts and fulfil all his obligations before commencing the quest for his salvation [8] The tradition of liberation is also world-and-life-negating, in that it conceives liberation (*moksa*) as a state of transcendent being and consciousness, totally unrelated to this world and its values which are viewed as hindrances in a man's search for liberation This is again in sharp contrast to the world-and-life-affirming ethos of the earlier or Vedic tradition, with its three values, pertaining to the life-in-the-world

II *Two Concepts of Liberation as Developed in the Systems of Philosophy (Darśanas)*

Just as in other traditions of Hinduism, morality in the tradition of liberation or the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*) is determined by its concept of the supreme goal, liberation Of the six orthodox systems of philosophy (*darśanas*), all, but *Mimāmsā*, affirm liberation as the ultimate goal of human life They all agree that liberation is a transcendent state of being, unlike either this world or heaven They also agree that the way of action (largely conceived as ritualistic acts) cannot be of any use in man's quest of liberation At the same time, they conceive liberation quite differently in consonance with their respective metaphysical viewpoints The five orthodox systems of philosophy which affirm the goal of liberation may be divided into two broad categories, Vedanta and the rest, i e Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sāmkhya and Yoga The last four are grouped together by us because they uphold a more or less similar concept of liberation which is very different

from that of the Vedanta. Thus, we have two concepts of liberation, the Vedāntic and the Sāmkhyan, and these two concepts in their turn have given rise to two rather different outlooks or attitudes towards the world, life and morality. Gradually, the two concepts of liberation merged together, resulting in the development of a uniform but negative morality in the tradition of liberation. We think that the two viewpoints were initially developed independently, and so their ethoses are quite different, even though they do not any more exist as separate systems of thought and morality.

(1) The Vedantic concept of liberation is metaphysical or even mystical and cannot be appreciated without a prior understanding of the Vedāntic religio-philosophy (*darśana*). The Upanisads, as we know, subscribe to a monistic world-view, according to which there is only one nondual Absolute which is both the source, ground and Inner-controller of the world (*Brahman*),[9] as well as the innermost Self of man (*Ātman*).[10] The very immanence of *Ātman-Brahman* in the world implies its transcendent being, for only a truly transcendent reality can be thus immanent in all.[11] That is why, the Upanisadic seers are never tired of proclaiming the transcendence of *Brahman* by means of the use of negation of all determinate descriptions of It (*Neti-neti*).[12]

In the original Vedanta, the individual self is essentially the same as *Brahman*, and its individual being is just a transient product of the association of the Pure-consciousness with individuating factors, such as intelligence, mind, vital breath etc.[13] Now, if the essence of the individual self is the supreme Self, the individual existence becomes rather illusory, or at best an undesirable state of imperfection, and the ultimate goal of human life becomes the realization of one's identity with the supreme Self. This Vedantic liberation (*moksa*) is a state of unitive experience which transcends the duality of the knower and the known.[14] In that state, the individual self does not know the absolute Self, but rather 'becomes' that Self, and that becoming is to be understood in terms of self-transcendence.

There is a suggestion of some existential distinction between the individual self and the transcendent Self in the famous Upanisadic simile of two birds. But even there it is clearly stated that when the individual self realizes its true nature as identical with the transcendent Witness-consciousness, it has no more any cons-

ciousness of individuality [15] The same Upaniṣad has also used the simile of the rivers merging into the sea to express the state of liberation as merger of the individual self into *Brahman* [16]

This understanding of unitive experience in terms of self-transcendence is in the best tradition of mysticism and is comparable to the Sūfī concept of *fanā* or self-naughting This is no negative experience, as is clear from several Vedāntic passages which describe the state of liberation or mystical union as characterized by a sense of freedom, peace and even exhilaration [17] Significantly, the above concept of liberation does not refer to the theory of karma and transmigratory existence, as liberation is conceived in the Upanisads mostly as mystico-unitive experience which can be realized here and now

(ii) The second concept of liberation comes from Samkhya and it is shared in its broad outline by the remaining three systems of philosophy, i e Nyāya, Vaiseṣika and Yoga Tradition groups the six systems of philosophy as orthodox, that is, based on the Vedas, and contrasts them with the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism Probably there was no such clear-cut distinction in the beginning Kumārila included Sâmkhya, Yoga, Pasupata and Pañcaratra systems, along with Buddhism, in the category of philosophies opposed to Vedas (*Veda-viruddha*) [18] There is a strong possibility that Samkhya and Yoga originated in some non-Vedic tradition At the same time, excepting Vedānta, Sāmkhya is the most important system of orthodox philosophy It has had far-reaching influence on the entire Hindu thinking R Garbe has rightly remarked that the entire Indian literature has been saturated with the doctrines of Sāmkhya [19]

As ably argued by Prof G C Pande, Samkhya is an atheistic, pluralistic and pessimistic philosophy and expresses an entirely different ethos from that of the Vedic-Vedantic tradition In his own words,

"Independence from Vedic revelation, complete pessimism about natural life, atheism and rejection of Vedic ritualism, all these features of the Samkhyan doctrine attest its origin among the non-Vedic ascetics and mendicants, called the *Śramanas* Historically, thus, Samkhya and Vedanta are quite independent and were often hostile They enshrine quite different types of cultural *Weltanschauung* This remains true in spite of the fact that

the Vedānta borrowed a lot from Sāmkhya and attempts were made from time to time to create synthetic systems "[20]

As is well-known, Sāmkhya-Yoga affirm two ultimate realities —the *purusa* (self) and the *prakrti* (nature) According to this view, the self is a transcendent pure-consciousness and it is the nature which is the real subject of all our experiences and the agent of all our actions [21] Samkhya naively argues for the plurality of selves on the basis of differences in the temperaments, capacities and external circumstances of various living beings [22] It seems to us that the Samkhya philosophy contains a basic self-inconsistency, as the plurality of selves, transmigratory existence and the law of karma cannot be justified on the basis of the Samkhyan hypothesis of a totally transcendent self And yet, not only Sāmkhyas, but most Hindu thinkers and all religious texts have affirmed both beliefs A typical example is provided by the *Bhagavadgītā* which believes in both, the transmigratory existence, implying the plurality of selves,[23] and the transcendent nature of the self [24]

Samkhyas conceive liberation in self-centric terms Their concept of liberation is derived from their concept of the self which is an ultimate, transcendent reality and which, like the monads of Leibniz, is self-sufficient and alone or unrelated to the world and other selves The self's involvement in the transmigratory existence is considered its bondage, and its liberation consists in getting rid of this false involvement and realizing its original pure nature or aloneness [25]

The Nyaya-Vaisesika concept of liberation is closer to the *kaivalya* of Samkhya, rather than to the Vedantic *moksa* The self, in Nyaya, is unique to each individual, and there are innumerable individual souls Liberation means the realization by the soul of its original pure nature, and the liberated self exists as a pure substance without any qualifying attributes, including consciousness Thus, in all of these philosophies, excepting Vedanta, liberation consists in the realization of the self's original nature and has no reference to a Divine Being

(iii) Śamkara's Advaita was the first step towards an amalgamation of the two approaches, the Samkhyan and the Vedantic Being a true Advaitin, Śamkara cannot accept the Samkhya doctrine of a plurality of selves and firmly believes in the individual

selves being identical with the supreme Self He argues in a convincing manner that since all selves are identical with the Pure-consciousness or universal Self, the separate identity of the individual self and its distinction from other selves are illusory, or at best empirical [26] Śamkara is also fully aware of the implications of the Upanisadic identification of the *Ātman* with *Brahman* which means that the ultimate Reality of Vedanta is a universal and transcendent one, and not one's individual self To quote Śamkara,

"Indeed distinct from the agent who is the content of 'I', the real Self is the Witness of the idea of 'I', which exists in all creatures, which is one, unchanging, eternal and all-pervading Consciousness It is the Self of all, It is beyond all rejection and acceptance, for all mutable and impermanent things culminate in *Purusa* as their ultimate limit "[27]

If the individual self is essentially identical with the universal Self, then its bondage consists only in its apparent separate existence and its liberation would mean its merger into the universal Consciousness Śamkara often explains liberation in the familiar terminology of the Upanisadic seers, as the merger of the individual consciousness into the universal Consciousness [28]

So far Samkara seems to be very close to the spirit of the original Vedanta But either he is not always self-consistent, or the nature of the metaphysical truth is such that it defies all logical descriptions Thus it happens that Śamkara mostly understands liberation as Self-realization, and explains the latter in terms largely reminiscent of the Samkhya philosophy [29]

The reason for this rather inconsistent approach lies in Śamkara's understanding of the Absolute (*Ātman-Brahman*) exclusively in terms of the Self (*Ātman*) According to him, no man can deny his own self,[30] and if it is asserted that the reality behind the universe is the same as the Self within, then the being of the Absolute also does not require any proof [31] Perhaps because of the very certitude of the being of one's inner Self, Samkara always prefers the word *Ātman* to describe the ultimate Reality Even when the context is definitely cosmic, he still chooses to call the Absolute *Ātman* or Self [32]

Śamkara further seeks to understand and explain the *Ātman* in a subjective context, as the presupposition of all our experiences

and knowledge [33] Of course, the Upanisads have described the Self in exactly these terms, but their understanding of the Absolute is saved from the subjective bias by their constant equation between *Ātman* and *Brahman* On the other hand, even though Śamkara is equally convinced of the universality and transcendence of the *Ātman*, his choice of the term *Ātman* to denote the Absolute and the subjective context in which the reality of the *Ātman* is mostly understood by him give the impression that it is the inner Self, and not *Brahman*, that is being discussed In his own words,

"The non-attainment of the Self is but the ignorance of It Hence knowledge of the Self is Its attainment Here there is no difference between the person attaining and the object attained "[34]

In all such passages Śamkara has still not departed from the original Vedantic vision But there is a subtle, perhaps unconscious, shift from the Vedantic position in his discussions Liberation is no longer conceived as merger of the individual self into the universal Divine Being, but as the realization of one's Self This subtle change in emphasis was destined to transform the entire post-Śamkara Advaita, and even popular Hinduism to a certain extent

III The Self-centric Approach of the Philosophies of Liberation and Its Influence on Morality

(1) The general philosophic approach and the concept of liberation in all the classical systems of philosophy, except Mīmamsa, is to a certain extent self-centric But R C Zaehner is entirely off the mark when he indiscriminately groups together Samkhya and Vedanta under the category of soul-centric mysticism [35] While the Samkhya liberation can be understood only in terms of a soul-centric approach, the *moksa* of neither in Upanisadic Vedanta, nor even that of the Advaita of Śamkara, can thus be understood as soul-centric The individual soul is never the object or goal of seeking, or the referent of mystical experience in the classical Vedanta

We have argued in our second section for the essential difference between the Vedic-Vedantic approach and the Samkhya one And yet, the Samkhya ideas have so much influenced and

conditioned the Vedantic writers, that the post-Śamkara Advaita Vedanta appears to be some kind of subjective idealism To a certain extent, all major philosophic systems share one faith, best described in the words of Prof N K Devaraja

"Release in these systems consists, not in the establishment of a relationship with a being external to the self, but in the realization of the essential nature of one's own self" And,

"Our conclusion is that the classical systems of Indian philosophy conceived the ultimate goal of man's existence as being intrinsic to him, it consists, according to them, in the realization or attainment of a perfection which is inherent in our own being "[36]

It is this introverted vision which has brought all philosophies close to each other The Sāmkhya upholds the individual self (*purusa*) as the ultimate reality and the referent of the concept of liberation, while the Vedanta asserts that it is the supreme universal Self that is realized in the state of liberation Yet both conceive their respective realities as within us, i e our very self Both Sāmkhya and Vedānta further affirm that this inner reality is realized through introverted contemplation

Ninian Smart has made some very interesting observations in this context According to him, a meditational approach in religion is mostly associated with a belief in the plurality of selves It implies that the self that is realized in introverted contemplation or meditation is the individual self On the other hand, a devotional approach presupposes a personal Lord who is also the Creator God When the devotional and meditational approaches are combined, we have the concept of the Absolute who is both the Creator and the inner Self[37] If we apply these observations to the various classical systems of philosophy, we would find that the Samkhya-Yoga self consistently affirm the plurality of selves and a meditational approach to the religious goal But the Vedanta emphatically affirms an all-comprehending Absolute, and yet recommends the way of meditation as the means of realizing one's identity with the Absolute[38] It is this emphasis on meditation or introverted contemplation that led to the greater self-centricity of later Advaita Vedanta (It was only when the devotional approach was emphasized in the *Bhakti* tradition that a more balanced and comprehensive religio-philosophical approach could be developed Perhaps due to this exclusive

preference for introverted contemplation, the later Advaitins were led to interpret the Absolute more and more in terms of the subject self Thus, Advaita Vedānta has an inherent tendency towards self-centricism which has only been strengthened by the influence of Sāmkhya ideas As a result, even Śamkara often describes the Vedāntic vision in a way that appears soul-centric

"Without action, a non-agent and one without a second, I, the universal Self, make the world go round like a king who is only a witness or like the loadstone which moves iron by its proximity only"[39]

The tendency of understanding both the supreme Reality and liberation in terms of the subjective self increased in post-Śamkara Advaita Later Advaitic writers do not even bother to refer to the cosmic or universal nature of the Self, and frankly describe liberation or the mystical experience of ultimate identity in subjective terms Later minor Upanisads are full of such supposedly mystical declarations, as the following

"I am 'I' (the Self) I am also another (the not-Self) I am *Brahman* I am the source (of all things) I am the Supreme I am I am all"[40]

Such passages can be multiplied indefinitely from the works of Advaita writers like Prakasatman, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, Citsukha, Śrīharsa etc The true unitive experience denies the individual self in order to affirm the sole reality of the 'Divine' Here the process seems to be reversed, and the man of realization seems to repeatedly sing the glory of his own self[41] This apparently soul-centric understanding of liberation brings post-Śamkara Advaita very close to the subjective idealism of Buddhist Vijñanavada variety The teacher tells his disciple in the *Astāvakra Samhitā*

"It is through your ignorance alone that the universe exists In reality you are one There is no individual self or supreme Self other than you"[42]

There is another closely related reason for the later transformation of the Vedanta into a self-centric philosophy The Vedanta not only asserts the essential identity of the individual self and the universal Self, it also uses the same term *ātman* for both And there is no way we can tell which self is being talked about in a given context This has caused certain confusion in the Vedantic approach from very early times

It is not that the Upaniṣadic seers are entirely free from blame for the above confusion They often indulge in quite self-centric statements which are open to misinterpretation due to their vague use of the concept of self The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* declares that one loves others, not for their sake, but for the sake of the Self The husband loves the wife, or the wife loves the husband, or the parent loves the son, but in all such love the real object of love is not the wife, husband, or son, but the Self[43] Obviously, the Upanisad means the universal Self here which is common to all, the ultimate Reality behind all distinctions of name and form But the Upanisad uses the term *ātman*, and as pointed out by R C Zaehner at some place, there are no capital letters in the Sanskrit language, so that it is difficult to know as to which self is being discussed in a given context Such assertions are always liable to be misunderstood as referring to the subjective self Commenting on the above passage, Vidyāranya says

"A wife shows affection for her husband when she desires his company

"Her love is not for the husband's sake, but for her own Similarly, the husband's love also is for his own satisfaction and not for hers

"Thus, even in the mutual love between husband and wife the incentive is one's own desire for happiness "[44]

In the same context he further says

" 'May I never perish, may I ever exist', is the desire seen in all So love for the self is quite evident "[45]

That the term self is understood here as the individual self is obvious, but what is even more surprising is the extreme egoistic and hedonistic tone of the entire explanation The above observations of Vidyāranya are not even psychologically true, what to say of their spiritual or moral worth The word *svārtha* (for one's own sake) is liberally used by Vidyaranya, suggesting that one's own interests come first and foremost The self whose interests are so dear to man can but be the subject self and not the universal Self, common to all To quote Vidyaranya again

"A son is dearer than wealth, the body dearer than the son, the sense organs dearer than the body and the self is supremely dear than life and mind "[46]

The context of body and senses leaves no doubt as to which self

is being referred here How and why this unfortunate transformation in the meaning of the concept of *ātman* took place is difficult to say But there is no doubt that it has had very important negative ramifications for morality

(ii) This philosophical soul-centricism seems to have penetrated popular Hindu thought quite early A verse of the *Mahābhārata* advises that a person mav be sacrificed for the sake of the family, the family may be sacrificed for the sake of the village and the village for the sake of the country, and concludes that for the sake of the *ātman* the whole earth can be sacrificed [47] (The advice was given by Krsna to Dhrtarastra and concerned the need to sacrifice Duryodhana to save the kingdom) Both the context of the advice and the manner of its presentation leave no doubt as to which self is being talked about here This passage of the Epic is a classical example of the confusion in the Indian mind between the two senses of the term *ātman*, and the dangerous implications of this confusion for Hindu morality

It is generally contended in reply to any charge of soul-centricism that the interest of the self for which all else must be sacrificed is not any material or selfish interest of the individual, but the spiritual interest of liberation (*moksa*) which is a transcendent and in a way an impersonal goal But the above passages from *the Pañcadaśi* and *Mahābhārata* are not talking about liberation They simply seem to be saying that the interests of the individual self are the governing consideration in all human actions Moreover, even if they mean that all relations and obligations must be sacrificed foı the sake of individual's liberation, it would hardly make a relevant difference to social morality Does it make any great difference whether you sacrifice the interests of the entire earth for your selfish (in the materialistic or hedonistic sense) interests, or for the sake of your personal salvation? This kind of pseudo-philosophical individualism definitely undermines the values of social morality

The soul-centric ideas of popular religious texts are founded on certain vaguely formulated ontological beliefs, regarding the nature of bondage, the nature of the soul, the plurality of souls, the duality of the soul and body and the causes of bondage and liberation Above all, this popular tradition believes in the law of karma and transmigratory existence and conceives liberation

primarily in terms of freedom from the cycle of rebirths The law of karma is responsible for the extreme individualism of this approach According to Manu

"Living being is born alone, he dies alone, he suffers the good and bad fruits of his accumulated merits and demerits alone "[48]

Since man alone is responsible for his destiny, and since each man acts and suffers alone, no one else is responsible for his sufferings, joys or final destiny, no one can directly and effectively help him In this context, the story of Valmīki's early life as a robber is revealing Once Dharma and other gods asked Vālmīki, in order to enlighten him, whether his family members, for whose sake he was committing so many crimes, would share with him the sin accruing from his criminal deeds When Valmīki asked this question from his wife and parents, thev flatly refused, saying that every man's sins and merits are his own and cannot be shared by others Disillusioned thus, Valmīki abandoned his mode of life, as well as his family, and set upon the search for his liberation The individualism implied in the above story has become very deep rooted in the Indian psyche The *Mahābhārata* advises that if a man desires liberation, he should renounce the world and should not let himself be bothered by such thoughts as, 'how would my dependents be sustained, if I renounce them?' Such a man should not worry about others, as no one is responsible for the fate of others He should remember that whether he lives or dies (worrying about others), others would suffer only what they deserve Knowing this, he should understand that he can in no way help others, and therefore, he should devote himself whole-heartedly to the pursuit of his liberation [49]

From Manu to Kabīr, all Hindu saints and philosophers have emphasized the fact that man dies alone and after he is dead, no one else, except his own merits and demerits, accompanies him to the other world [50] Kabīr repeatedly sings how all relatives leave and forget a man when he is dead, thus emphasizing the essentially lonely character of man's journey through transmigratory existence (*samsāra*) Of course, all Hindus also believe in the transference of merit, and the virtue of compassion, but these ideas are generally overshadowed by the strong universal belief in the law of karma The latter has resulted in an attitude of detachment towards the sufferings of others which are mostly

seen as results of their own past actions, and hence as what they themselves deserve (This does not hold true for the devotional saints like Kabīr and Nanak Even though they often emphasize the aloneness of man, their main concern is devotion to the Lord which makes all the difference to their mental attitude and values We shall have occasion to discuss them in our next chapter *infra*)

Though in the present-day Hindu society the desire for liberation is no longer a relevant factor in man's religio-moral conduct, the self-centric approach which is intimately associated with the quest of liberation is even now quite evident in Hindu thought and conduct It is so, because while most Hindus do not take the supra-mundane values and goals of the tradition of liberation seriously, they all firmly believe in the law of karma which has been an integral part of the later Hindu concept of liberation And this law of karma is a thoroughly individualistic theory which engenders a similarly individualistic or self-centric approach in socio-moral matters

IV World-and-Life-Negation in the Tradition of Liberation

For the Samkhya-Yoga the world is real, while for the Advaita Vedanta it is empirically real, but ontologically false Both agree that the soul's connection with it is transient and false, a product of the cosmic ignorance (*avidyā*) or non-discrimination (*aviveka*) between the self and the not-self or nature Śamkara adds that not only the bondage of the self, but the entire world of name and form (including man's empirical personality) is false, a projection of the *māyā* or *avidyā* [51] At the same time, *avidyā* remains a cosmic entity for Śamkara which is rather to be understood as a power of *Brahman* [52] On the other hand, later Advaita works either declare *avidyā* as belonging to the self (*jiva*), or just dispense with it, and simply assert the world-diversity to be a false projection (*vivarta*) or play (*vilāsa*) of the mind (*citta* or *manas*) [53] This makes the world a creation of the individual self or even mind, and as such totally unreal

While the Advaitins declared the world to be false, the Samkhyas understood it as full of suffering Popular treatises accepted both the ideas They argued rhetorically for the transitoriness,

painfulness, undesirability and even the unreality of the world The transience of life and objects of desire, the undesirability of old age, disease and death were constantly harped upon Persistent attempts were made to paint the life-in-the world in the darkest colours Morbidly exaggerated versions of the supposedly filthy nature of human body, old age and its miseries were given in order to create repulsion for them in the mind of the listeners

"This body which is composed of intestines, muscles etc and is subject to change comes into being in this world simply to undergo pain What thing more palpably fruitless, pain-giving and degraded could be conceived of than this body ?"[54]

The woman suffered most at the hands of these fanatical advocates of *nivrtti* or turning-away-from-the world, as she was seen to be the centre of man's lust for worldly pleasures Such writers excelled in rejecting the desirability of woman through a morbid dissection of her body[55] This world-and-life-negation leading to a turning-away-of-the-mind-from-the world (*nivrtti-mārga*) had necessarily to negate all that the creed of an active life-in-the world (*pravrtti-mārga*) stood for[56] Though this creed could find some support in the Vedantic dictum that 'the Immortal cannot be realized through the mortal', the morbid way in which life's sufferings and transitoriness were argued suggests the influence of some non-Vedic tradition If we were to undertake a comparative study of the Buddhist and later Vedāntic thought on this subject, we would find a marked similarity between the two Later Vedāntins seem to follow Buddhist thinkers both in the negative conclusions (regarding the reality and the worth of the world) and the dialectical reasoning applied to reach those conclusions[57]

Once this tradition gained popularity, it exercised a profound influence on the Hindu psyche Albert Schweitzer and other critics have argued that the world-and-life-negation found in Hindu philosophy cuts at the very roots of morality You cannot possibly engage yourself in meaningful moral action in a false and meaningless world[58] Prof S Radhakrishnan has given a detailed reply to the above criticism by arguing first, that Hinduism has world-and-life-affirmation also in equal measure, and secondly, that other religions also contain world-and-life-

negation[59] His arguments are well-documented and conclusive, but they still do not prove that the world-and-life-negation of the tradition of liberation does not negatively affect Hindu morality

V The Creed of Renunciation Integrally Related to the Way of Knowledge

The creed of renunciation follows from some generally agreed contentions of the philosophies of liberation Life-in-the world is understood in this tradition to be a state of bondage, a result of ignorance of the true nature of one's self, while the self is conceived as a transcendent consciousness, unrelated to the world of diversity We would concentrate here on the Advaita views on the relation between knowledge and action, first, because they have been most influential in shaping up the Hindu attitude towards life-in-the world, and secondly, because they are most consistently presented

(1) According to the Advaita Vedanta, the way of action (and social morality) is of no use in a man's quest for liberation It is so because work is useful only in the context of temporal goals, such as achieving or producing something new, but it can have no use in the realization of the *Ātman* which is our very Self[60] The only obstruction in the realization of Self is our ignorance of our real nature This ignorance can be destroyed only by its opposite, i e knowledge of one's true nature, and not by action, since action is in no way contradictory to ignorance[61] Rather, action belongs to the domain of ignorance, as it presupposes the reality of the world and attributes agency and individuality to the Self, which are both illusory products of the cosmic ignorance (*avidyā*)[62] Śamkara, therefore, contends that,

"(Renunciation of works) is necessary, for *mokṣa* consists in the realization of the immutability of one's Self Hence the conclusion that devotion to knowledge should be practised through renunciation of action"[63]

The conclusion that renunciation of action is mandatory for a seeker of liberation does not necessarily follow from the contention that the way of works cannot lead to liberation, unless you also believe that action should be undertaken only if it is conducive to some personal end Advaitins seem to think so

"No one engages in any activity in matters towards which he is indifferent Why should the one desirous of liberation act, seeing that he is indifferent to the three worlds?"[64]

It seems that the creed of renunciation was very closely related to the self-centric approach of the philosophies of liberation It was not very popular at the time of the Upanisads, when most of the teachers of the knowledge of *Brahman* were householders Later Upanisads recommended the way of renunciation only as an alternative means of liberation, saying that some have attained immortality through renunciation[65] It was only gradually that the creed of renunciation gained wide acceptance under the influence of the heterodox traditions of Jainism and Buddhism At first renunciation (*samnyāsa*) was accepted as the fourth stage of life And then it was boldly affirmed that since the renunciation of the world is a pre-requisite for any quest for liberation, a man can renounce the world whenever a desire to do the same arises in his mind, even though he may still be a student[66]

(ii) Advaitins are equally positive regarding the uselessness or undesirability of the way of action for a man who is liberated-while-living (*jivan-mukta*) Sāmkhya, Yoga and Advaita Vedanta believe that even though the knowledge of the ultimate Truth liberates a man here and now, it does not terminate the present life, so that there is always a period when a man of knowledge continues to live due to the force of his past actions (*prārabdha-karma*) Such a man is known as one who is liberated-while-living,[67] and is naturally the paradigm of human perfection According to the Upanisads, renunciation of, and complete detachment towards, the world of diversity and desires become natural for such a man

"Wishing for this world (Self) alone, the monks renounce their homes The knowers of *Brahman* of olden times, it is said, did not wish for offspring, because they thought, 'what shall we do with offspring, we who have attained this Self, this world?'"[68]

Śamkara affirms liberation to be a transcendent state of being or a state of disembodiedness which is totally unrelated to the mundane world of time, distinctions and action Taking this transcendent nature of liberation as his point of departure, Śamkara gives several related arguments in support of the advisability of a life of renunciation of all actions in the world for a knower of *Brahman*

First, all action (or morality) presupposes the reality of the world diversity, as well as the being of the empirical subject or agent of actions Now, both, the world and the empirical self, are supposed to be the products of the cosmic ignorance (*avidyā*) in Advaita Vedanta It is further asserted by Śamkara and others that this *avidyā* is destroyed (sublated) by the knowledge of *Brahman*, and with the destruction of the ignorance both, the world and the agent of actions, are realized as illusory Śamkara concludes from the above that engagement in action is not possible for a knower of *Brahman*, who is thus convinced of the illusory nature of everything [69] Secondly, all action presupposes the attribution of agency and other qualifications to the Self, while metaphysical knowledge reveals the Self to be actionless and transcendent A man who has realized his unconditional identity with the transcendent Self cannot, therefore, engage himself in worldly activities [70] Śamkara concludes that

"All dualistic dealings, brought about by unreal ignorance, are sublated by right knowledge"[71]

Śamkara's third argument against the possibility of the performance of actions by a knower of *Brahman* is not a metaphysical one, and refers to the psychology of a liberated man Such a man feels a profound gratification and sense of fulfilment Since all action is *exhypothesi* taken up for the fulfilment of some personal desire or the other, no action is possible for such a man (except that done for the bare maintenance of the body) Samkara believes that the renunciation of the world of actions is a spontaneous act on the part of a knower of *Brahman* and needs no extraneous justification [72]

This last argument, which directly refers to the psychology of the man of realization, is the most misleading of all It denies completely the possibility of action with motives other than the purely selfish ones This argument deliberately neglects to take cognizance of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s ideal of desireless performance of one's duties It is implied in all such arguments that a man must above all look after his spiritual welfare, and as it is served best by renouncing the world and all its obligations, he must do so A seeker of liberation must renounce the world (and indirectly all his duties towards his fellow beings), since his supreme goal, liberation, cannot be achieved through a life of action (and

morality) A man who has realized his liberation here and now (*jivan-mukta*) must also renounce the world, since he has no personal desires which can motivate him to take up a life of action It seems to us that this way of thinking regards a man's personal interest as his primary concern Whether a man engages in worldly activities or desists therefrom depends upon whether he desires mundane objects or liberation The goal may be different, but it has to be a personal goal

VI Ethical Discipline As a Means of Liberation

Even though the creed of renunciation implies a certain devaluation of the way of works and morality (*karma-mārga*), at no place have the Hindu thinkers undermined morality Morality is mostly understood in this tradition in the context of liberation, and it is unanimously agreed that a high level of self-discipline and purity of heart are a pre-requisite of even one's undertaking the quest for liberation According to the *Katha Upanisad*,

"He, who has not first turned away from wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued and whose mind is not at peace, cannot attain the *Ātman* "[73]

The aim of the ethical discipline, suggested in the Upanisads, is total transformation or spiritualization of man's empirical personality "When all desires that dwell in the heart fall away", says the same Upanisad, "then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains *Brahman* "[74] Here desires signify all lower tendencies of the mind and passions which must be transcended or conquered before one can aspire for the unitive experience The *Muṇḍaka Upanisad* even contends that the practice of cardinal moral virtues is a direct means of the realization of the supreme Self

"This *Ātman*, resplendent and pure, whom the sinless *samnyāsins* behold as residing within the body, is attained by unceasing practice of truthfulness, austerity, right knowledge and continence "[75]

Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya and Yoga not only regard ethical discipline as a pre-requisite of acquiring knowledge, but also affirm the two to be mutually complementary All the popular religious texts contend that one cannot hope for liberation without

first achieving moral perfection which is generally conceived as consisting in the control of the senses and passions and the practice of such virtues as non-violence and forgiveness [76]

Both Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedanta regard the *avidyā* or primeval ignorance as the cause of man's bondage But while Śamkara conceives *avidyā* mainly as contradictory to knowledge, for Sāmkhya-Yoga it represents man's entire mental set-up and includes not only positive mis-apprehension (*avidyā*), but also egoism (*asmitā*), desire (*rāga*), aversion (*dvesa*) and fear or clinging to life (*abhiniveśa*) [77] Samkhya also believes that the discriminatory knowledge (*viveka*) which liberates the soul from transmigratory existence is achieved through the practice of strict ethical discipline The chief virtues valued by Samkhya and Yoga are *vairāgya* (complete detachment) and *viveka* (discriminatory knowledge of the self and the not-self) In addition, one must undergo primary ethical discipline which aims at the purification of the (lower) self It consists of the well-known rules of ethical discipline, called *yamas* (i e truth, non-violence, non-stealing, sense-control and non-acceptance of gifts) and *niyamas* (i e purification of the body and mind, contentment, austerity, study of scriptures and devotion to God) [78] Both sets of virtues are more or less negative and pertain to self-culture Other-regarding virtues find no place in the above list

Here Yoga offers some positive suggestions It observes that certain evil propensities of the mind like egoism, attachment, aversion etc obstruct the task of self-discipline It advises that the best way to curb them is not to suppress them forcefully, but to counter them by the development of positive feelings that are directly opposed to them The *Yoga Sūtras* advise the development of four great positive feelings, viz friendliness towards all (*maitri*), compassion towards the suffering (*karunā*), happiness at the good fortune of others (*muditā*), and detachment towards evil persons (*upeksā*) [79] Yoga shares the conception of the four positive feelings with Buddhism The *Yoga Vāsistha*, an Advaita work, also advocates the practice of these four virtues According to it, the mind has two kinds of tendencies (*vāsanās*), pure and impure, and the latter can be mastered by the assiduous practice of the four positive virtues [80] These four virtues are as positive and other-regarding as can ever be conceived But unfortunately, these feelings are

generally valued as aids to self-discipline and do not provide a motive for acts of mercy or active help of others What is more, these positive feelings are to be transcended, along with all the negative or impure tendencies or feelings, in the state of *samādhi*, which is the culmination of yogic discipline The aim is the gradual control of the senses and the mind, resulting in the severing of all contact of the mind with the outer world and the cessation of all modes of the mind (*citta-vrtti-nirodha*) [81] The state of trance (*samādhi*) is a mystical experience of transcendence of all thought processes, as well as the consciousness of individuality The way to this transcendent experience is through the practice of yogic discipline (*abhyāsa*) and complete detachment (*vairāgya*) [82] The usual yogic discipline, consisting of control of breath, deliberate withdrawal of the senses and mind from the outer world, meditation (*dhyāna*) and finally deep trance (*samādhi*), is accepted by all other schools of philosophy and Hindu texts as a means of self-purification [83] It is to be noted here that the yogic discipline is fully self-centred and aims at directing the mind away from the world and even from one's inner thoughts When a yogin sits to practise yoga, he simply cuts himself off from the entire world The universal acceptance of yogic discipline as a means to man's spiritual goal is responsible for much of the self-centredness in the Hindu ethos

According to Śamkara, the search for liberation (or the inquiry about *Brahman*) can be commenced only after one has acquired complete self-purification through the practice of four cardinal virtues, viz discrimination between the Self and the not-Self (*viveka*), dispassion or turning-away-from-the world (*vairāgya*), the [group of six virtues viz calmness (*śama*), self-control (*dama*), withdrawal from sense objects (*uparati*), forbearance or bearing all the vicissitudes of life with absolute indifference (*titiksā*), faith in the teacher and scriptures (*sraddhā*) and constant concentration of the self on *Brahman* (*samādhāna*)] and intense yearning for freedom (*mumuksutva*) [84]

Śamkara also accepts the worth of moral action or the selfless performance of one's duties, but regards it only as an indirect means (*ārādupakāraka*) of liberation The practice of moral virtues and moral conduct are useful for achieving self-purification which is a necessary condition for acquiring the knowledge of Self which,

in its turn, is the true means of liberation [85] This approach in a way devaluates moral conduct by declaring it to be of secondary importance, but it also makes it a pre-condition of any quest for liberation, and hence mandatory for a seeker thereof In his minor works Śamkara even acknowledges the usefulness of the way of yogic concentration, leading to supra-conscious trance (*samādhi*) as a means of liberation [86]

Both, the list of virtues given by Śamkara and the *yamas* and *niyamas* given in the *Yoga Sūtras*, are generally accepted by all the philosophies of liberation According to the later Advaita writers, the mind's affective inclinations (*vāsanās*) and conative tendencies (*samkalpas*) are the cause of the soul's (apparent) bondage, and therefore the metaphysical knowledge of the true nature of the self alone is not sufficient, and must be supplemented by a very strict control of the mind and all its affective-conative tendencies The aim of the ethical discipline is the complete restraint of all inclinations or tendencies of the mind (*vāsanākṣaya*), leading to a total destruction of the mind (*manonāśa*) A complete destruction of the mind and its various tendencies also constitutes an integral part of the state of liberation [87] In a way, the later Advaitic works seem to give much greater importance to ethical discipline as a means of Self-realization than was perhaps given by Śamkara At the same time, the discipline advocated in the later Vedantic works is quite negative and self-centred

Complete detachment (*vairāgya*) is the key virtue or attitude which pervades and determines the entire morality of these philosophies of liberation The seeker of personal liberation is only interested in acquiring mastery over his lower self In order to do so, he turns his back away from his fellow beings A man cannot engage himself in meaningful moral activity in a frame of mind of absolute detachment (The detachment (*anāsakti*) advocated by the *Bhagavadgītā* is quite different from the detachment or dispassion (*vairāgya*) advocated by the philosophies of liberation)

VII *The Morality of a Liberated Man and the Ideal of Human Perfection*

Most of the philosophies of this tradition can be termed 'leap' philosophies, to borrow a significant phrase from Karl H Potter,

that is, they affirm a marked transition from the state of a seeker of liberation to that of a liberated-man-while-living (*jivan-mukta*) Now, this liberated man is also the paradigm of human perfection, so that the morality practised by him would truly represent the moral values and norms of the tradition of liberation

Both Sāmkhya and Yoga have acknowledged the state of liberation-while-living But their descriptions of a liberated man are mostly confined to the elucidation of the state of trance (*samādhi*) which transcends all empirical experience Presumably, no man stays in the trance throughout his life The question is—how does a man of realization behave when he is not lost in trance? An answer to this question can be found only in the Vedanta And since Vedanta is the central philosophy of Hinduism, the Vedantic concept of a man-of-liberation (*jivan-mukta*) is very important for a balanced evaluation of Hindu morality

(1) According to the Vedanta, complete detachment towards, and transcendence of, all worldly concerns and distinctions (and by implication of all moral norms) characterize a knower of *Brahman* or a liberated man The Upanisads have affirmed the futility of the life-in-the world for the knowers of *Brahman* thus

"He (the knower of *Brahman*) is not overcome by these two thoughts, 'For this I did an evil act and for this I did a good deed ' He overcomes both Things done or not done do not afflict him

"This is the eternal glory of *Brahman*, it neither increases, nor decreases through work Therefore, one should know the nature of that alone Knowing it one is not touched by evil actions "[88]

Such descriptions of the liberated man, mostly made from the mystical point of view, are sometimes amenable to the criticism that the man of realization is expected to be amoral or beyond ethical distinctions, or that he is given a licence for self-indulgence [89] But such observations are made by deliberately neglecting the unanimous emphasis on the total masterv over one's lower self and all its desires and passions as the pre-requisite of even one's undertaking the quest for liberation

Having asserted the transcendence of all worldly norms bv a knower of *Brahman*, the *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* goes on to explain its meaning

"Therefore he who knows it as such becomes self-controlled, calm, withdrawn into himself, patient and collected He sees the

Self in his own Self, he sees all as the Self Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes all evil He becomes sinless, taintless, free from doubts "[90]

The man of liberation has left the evil temptations far behind and in their absence there is no possibility of his indulging in evil As so aptly put by Śamkara, a person who has fallen into a ditch in the darkness does no more fall into it after sunrise [91] Suresvara expresses the same idea more forcefully

"If a man who has known this truth of oneness acts according to his wishes, then where is the difference between a knower of truth and a dog?"[92]

Here the knowledge of *Brahman* does not mean some kind of intellectual knowledge, rather, it is a mystico-unitive experience which involves a total transformation of the personality of the knower of *Brahman* Interestingly, later Vedantins do not believe in a marked transition from the state of the seeker to that of the knower of *Brahman* They seem to believe that the knower of *Brahman* or a liberated-man-while-living (*jivan-mukta*) is as much prone to evil temptations as a seeker They, therefore, prescribe an identical ethical discipline for both, a seeker of liberation and a man who is liberated This discipline mainly consists of yogic concentration, aiming at the complete restraint of all the affective-conative tendencies of the mind and the final destruction of the mind (see section VI *supra*) It means that they envisage no stage at which a man so transcends his empirical personality that no residue of evil propensities of the mind is left in him This stand seems to deny the classical concept of *jivan-mukti*

But theory apart, the later position is much more realistic and seeks to give morality its due Even Śamkara has acknowledged in his *Viveka-cūdāmani* that vigil and effort are needed to keep the mind disciplined, even after achieving the supreme unitive experience

"Even after the truth has been realized, there remains that strong beginningless obstinate impression, that one is the agent and experiencer which is the cause of one's transmigration It has to be carefully removed by living in a state of constant identification with the supreme Self Sages call that liberation which is the attenuation of *vāsanās* (tendencies or impressions) here and now "[93]

"There is no greater danger for a knower of *Brahman* (*jñānin*) than carelessness about his real nature From this comes delusion, then egoism, this is followed by bondage and this carries misery

"As sledge, even if removed, does not stay away for a moment, but covers the water again, similarly, *māyā* also covers even a wise man who is averse to meditation "[94]

Śamkara here seems to contradict his own stand in his philosophical commentaries It may express his personal view, as unhampered by philosophical necessity It means that all the Advaitins recognize the possibility of a knower of *Brahman* becoming a prey to his lower tendencies or mundane temptations, and recommend constant vigilance and practice of strict self-discipline Such a view could have provided a much needed emphasis on morality in the Vedānta, but instead, it led the Vedāntins to the extreme position of dread of the involvement of the knower in the world Most of the moral virtues advocated in this tradition aim at individual self-culture or self-mastery Certain inter-personal virtues like non-violence and forgiveness are also recognized, but even they are valued mostly as a means of protecting the self from passions or involvements in the world

(ii) To a certain extent, all the classical systems of philosophy share one vision of human perfection, which is best described in the words of Prof N K Devaraja

"The classical schools of Indian thought present us with a plurality of ontologies And yet the moral and religious implications of these ontologies are surprisingly similar Every system upholds the ideal of passionless sage, though each of them gives its own reasons for pursuing that ideal This leads us to note the most important result of the attainment of metaphysical knowledge and destruction of ignorance, viz the eradication of passions, consequent upon the liquidation of the empirical self or the ego-sense Common conclusion of the systems is that the person aspiring to reach the goal of ultimate release should cultivate complete detachment towards the pleasures and pains, victories and defeats, of the embodied spatio-temporal existence "[95]

Prof Devaraja suggests that the "intuition of the ideal life as consisting in detachment towards the vicissitudes of earthly existence" came first and the various ontologies were developed afterwards to provide the *raison d'etre* of such an ideal [96] But we feel

that both, the ideal of absolute detachment and the transcendentalist ontologies, are derived from the mystical experience of the early seers and thinkers Almost all religio-mystical experience has a transcendent core It is necessarily ineffable and its most important feature is the experience of transcendence of, or freedom from, all mundane distinctions and limitations The ideal of absolute detachment is naturally derived from this experience of transcendence While the various ontologies differ, the core of mystical experience seems to be common to all Indian philosophies of liberation, and so is the ideal of perfection A perfect man is universally understood as one who has totally transcended all worldly distinctions, norms and concerns Śamkara has given an eloquent description of a man-of-liberation (*jivan-mukta*) as follows

"The sage living alone enjoys the sense objects, being the very embodiment of desirelessness, always satisfied with his Self and himself present as the all

"Sometimes a fool, sometimes a sage, sometimes possessed of regal splendour, sometimes wandering, sometimes behaving like a motionless python, sometimes wearing a benign expression, sometimes honoured, sometimes insulted, sometimes unknown, thus lives the man of realization, ever happy with the supreme bliss

"Though without riches, yet ever content, though helpless, yet very powerful, though not enjoying the sense objects, yet eternally satisfied, though without an exemplar, yet looking upon all with an eye of equality

"Though doing, yet inactive, though experiencing the fruits of past actions, yet untouched by them, though possessed of a body, yet without identification with it, though limited, yet omnipresent is he

"Neither pleasure, nor pain, nor good, nor evil ever touches the knower of *Brahman* who always lives without the body idea

"The man of realization lives unmoved in the body, like a witness, free from mental oscillations like the point of the potter's wheel

"He neither directs the sense organs to their objects, nor detaches them from them, but stays like an unconcerned spectator And he has not the least regard for the fruits of actions, his mind

being thoroughly inebriated with drinking the undiluted elixir of the bliss of *Ātman*."[97]

The central idea here is the total transcendence of all mundane interests or concerns by the mystic saint and the resulting attitude of absolute detachment towards the world and all it stands for. The possibility of moral actions by a knower of *Brahman* is not denied, but the level of detachment (*vairāgya*) and the perception of the worthlessness of all mundane distinctions and concerns by the liberated-man-while-living are such that any meaningful moral action would be a psychological impossibility for him. Later Advaita works compete with each other in portraying the supreme state of Self-realization in more and more negative terms. And such descriptions are in sharp contrast with those of unitive experience found in the early Vedanta. See,

"That is the real supreme state wherein all determinate tendencies (*samkalpas*) are at rest, which resembles the state of a stone, and which is neither waking nor sleeping."[98]

A minor Upanisad, *Nārada-Parivrājaka*, gives the mode of life of an ideal ascetic thus:

"He is a *muni* who is devoid of love and hate, who regards equally a clod of earth, stone or gold, who does no injury to any living creature and is freed from all.

"He should be alone and desireless. He should not converse with anybody. An ascetic who plays the part of the dumb, the eunuch, the lone, the blind, the deaf and the idiot is emancipated through the above six means."[99]

The ascetic is advised in later Vedantic works not to perceive sense objects or persons, especially women, and never to respond to outer stimuli, and generally to behave as if in sleep. He is further advised to generally withdraw himself from the world and even to avoid speaking to others, lest the respect shown to him by them may divert him from his goal.[100] The *Yoga Vāsistha* enumerates seven stages of knowledge through which a seeker of liberation becomes progressively absorbed in his own consciousness and cut off from the world diversity, till at last he is totally lost to the outer world.[101]

The obsession of these ancient lovers of liberation with the need to stay free from all involvements must have precluded all possibility of their practising inter-personal morality. If you are so

much afraid of others, lest any contact with them bind you to this world, you can hardly bother about your obligations towards them This morbid concern often led the later Vedāntins to very negative and often amoral conclusions

"There is no attachment or aversion in the one for whom the ocean of the world has dried up His look is vacant, his action purposeless and his senses inoperative "[102] And,

"In the wise one, whose worldly life is exhausted and who has transcended the limitations of human nature, there is neither compassion, nor any desire to harm, neither any humility, nor insolence, neither wonder, nor mental disturbance "[103]

Though such works still say that a liberated man may work or perform his worldly duties, it is made clear that being supremely detached, the purposes and results of his actions have no interest for him This absolute detachment makes his actions mechanical and morally meaningless, as is evident from the following passage

"Devoid of the feelings of 'I' and 'mine', knowing for certain that nothing is, and with all his inner desires set at rest, the man of knowledge does not act, though he may be acting "[104]

Such descriptions of human perfection in terms of absolute detachment towards and transcendence of all worldly relations and concerns are found in almost all works of philosophy But while the ideal of complete withdrawal from the world is very much in consonance with the metaphysics of Sāmkhya-Yoga, it is not so easily reconciled with the Vedantic vision of an all-comprehending Absolute Significantly, there is a marked change in tone and emphasis in the descriptions of a man of liberation in the works of post-Śamkara Advaitins from those of the Upanisads and Śamkara's works This change reflects the change in the Advaitic philosophy itself, especially its concept of liberation (*moksa*) which came gradually to be conceived in terms of Samkhya *kaivalya* or realization by the soul of its transcendent aloneness

The entire approach engenders extreme individualism Excepting the theistic Vedanta, all Indian philosophies believe the individual to be the supreme arbiter of his destiny If a man is wholly responsible for, and necessarily reaps the fruits of, his actions, then he alone can realize his spiritual upliftment and final liberation through sustained personal effort Even a theistic work like the *Bhagavadgītā* subscribes to the above view

"Let a man raise himself by himself, let him not lower himself. He alone is the friend of himself, and he alone is the enemy of himself.

"To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is the friend of himself, but to him who has not conquered himself, his own self is like his enemy."[105]

Self-reliance in one's spiritual quest expresses an individualistic approach to morality, it also expresses faith in the possibility of one's achieving a total mastery over one's passions and inclinations, or freedom of will. The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* argues for freedom of will in a very forceful manner. According to it, man has in him both morally good and evil inclinations, and it is in his power to overcome the evil tendencies by a deliberate exercise of morally good feelings and inclinations (*vāsanās*). It assures us that if one tries, one can achieve anything, especially in the field of self-mastery.

"It is our good exertions that are attended by good results, as the bad ones are followed by bad consequences. Chance is a mere meaningless word."[106]

And,

"This is the long and short of scriptures that diligence preserves our minds from all evils by employing them to whatever is good and right."[107]

At the same time, even though we have distinguished between earlier and later versions of the Advaitic concept of liberation and human perfection, the difference between the two is not one of kind, but one of degree only. The main difference between the two sets of views lies in their emphasis and not in their content.

VIII Some Positive Suggestions for Morality in Vedānta

There were some thinkers within the tradition of liberation who did not fully subscribe to the above view. In his *Pañcadaśī*, Vidyaranya ridicules those who say that a knower of *Brahman* is incapable of performing actions, saying that they seem to equate the knowledge of *Brahman* with the disease of consumption.[108] Unitive vision, being a spiritual experience, exalts and spiritualizes one's entire personality and cannot result in a negative outcome, i.e. the destruction of all one's capacities. When

questioned about the ideal of *Jaḍa* Bharata who, having realized *Brahman*, behaved like an imbecile, Vidyaranya comments

"*Jada* Bharata and others never gave up food and sleep, nor were like sticks or stones It was because they were afraid of forming attachment that they behaved as if they were completely disinterested "[109]

Here lies the crux of the whole issue Advaitins practised absolute detachment and inaction for fear of involvement in the world, and not because of any metaphysical necessity But so long as they were afraid of getting involved, they could not have been enlightened, as enlightenment or Self-realization means total fearlessness (*abhaya*) Vidyāranya, therefore, concludes that a man of realization can perform his duties well, as there is nothing in the knowledge of the Self which clashes with the performance of one's duties He assures us that a life of action can in no way affect adversely either the knowledge or the mental peace of a liberated man [110] He adds that having no desires or needs for himself, the enlightened man acts for the welfare of others Vidyaranya recognizes an obligation on the part of the knower towards the ignorant

"It is proper that the wise man, when with the ignorant, should act in accordance with their actions, as a loving father acts according to the wishes of his children

"With the ignorant the wise man should behave in such a way as will enable them to have realization In this world he has no other duty, except awakening the ignorant "[111]

The classical texts of Vedanta are of the same opinion, the *Vedāntasāra* makes it clear that a life of action is quite possible for a man of liberation, as the supreme knowledge results in the sublimation or exaltation of one's empirical personality, and not in its destruction [112] If the knower of *Brahman* does not act, it is because he does not have any motive for performing actions The only possible motive for action, worthy of a knower of Self, is fellow-feeling or compassion (*karunā*) The worth of compassion as a motive for action is recognized by the Advaitins like Śamkara

"There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others, as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same without any motive whatsoever

"It is the very nature of the magnanimous to move of their own accord towards removing others' troubles"[113]

There is another significant positive suggestion for morality in Vedanta As we know, the *Chāndogya Upanisad* sharply distinguishes the stage of the man who is established in *Brahman* from the first three stages Similarly, Śamkara has emphatically affirmed that not only is *Brahman* beyond all class (*varna*) distinctions, the man who is identified with Him also transcends the distinctions and limitations of class (caste)[114] This implies that the class distinctions pertain only to the field of ignorance, and are transcended once the knowledge of the ultimate Reality is achieved That is why, a renunciant or man of knowledge is usually called *varnātīta* (beyond all *varnas*) in Vedāntic works The renunciant is also advised not to bother about the caste of the family from which he begs his food The idea is quite cogent for challenging the justifiability of the practice of caste distinctions which merely pertain to the world of ignorance

The Vedantic thinkers did not care to emphasize the value of compassion, nor did they ever try to develop the practical or moral implications of the Vedantic vision of one Self in all It is the task of a future Hindu thinker to develop or interpret the Vedantic ontology in such a way that it would provide a convincing justification for a morality of universal compassion It is not to deny that the Vedantic ontology of the transcendent Self contains suggestions that could well be interpreted in a self-centric manner But it also contains ideas which can be understood better in a cosmic or universal context The tradition of liberation is not so relevant in the present-day Hindu society, but Vedanta is very much so And an understanding of Vedanta, whether in self-centric terms or in more positive ones, has always been a potent factor in determining the moral philosophy of Hinduism

Notes

1 *Mundaka Up* I 2 7, also 8-9
2 Ibid I 2 10-12, *Brhad Up* II 4 2
3 *Brhad Up* III 1 1-2, IV 1 1
4 *Iśavasya* 1, 2, 11, *Br S* III 4 26-27, *B G* IV 41 42, V 3 4 etc

5 *B G* IV 41-42, V 7-13, XVIII 45-48
6 *S.B*, *B G*, introd to ch III, IV 4, 16, introd to ch V
7 Ibid, introd to ch III
8 *M S* VI 35-36, *Mbh Śān P* XXV 6, CCLXI 15-16
9 *Chan Up* III 14 1, VI 8 4, *Taittiriya Up* III 1 1, *Brhad Up* II 1 20, III 7 3 ff
10 *Chan Up* VI 8 1, *Brhad Up* IV 4 3, IV 4 25
11 See writer's *The Roots of World Religions* (1982), pp 131 ff, 162 ff
12 *Brhad Up* II 3 6, III 9 26, IV 2 4
13 Ibid IV 4 5-6, IV 4 22
14 Ibid II 4 12-14
15 *Mundaka Up* III 1 1-3
16 Ibid III 2 8-9, cf *Kaṭha Up* II 1 15, *Brhad Up* II 4 14
17 *Mundaka Up* II 2 8, *Bṛhad Up* I 4 10
18 *Tantra-vārttika* I 3 4, quoted in S Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (1956), vol II p 21
19 R Garbe, essay on Samkhya in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed by J Hastings (1954), vol XI, p 189
20 *Foundations of Indian Culture*, vol II, *Spiritual Vision and Symbolic Forms in Ancient India* (1984), p 90
21 *Samkhya Karika* 19-20
22 Ibid 18
23 *B G* II 12 ff, 20 ff
24 Ibid II 18 ff, III 27-28
25 *Samkhya Karikā* 61-62, *Yoga Sūtra* IV 33
26 *Ś B*, *Brhad Up* II 1 20
27 *S B*, *Br S* I 1 4
28 *S B*, *Bṛhad Up* II 4 12
29 *S B*, *Br S* I 1 4, *S B*, *Brhad Up*, introd to III 3 1
30 *Ś B*, *Br S* I 1 4
31 Ibid I 1 1
32 Ibid I 1 4, I 2 2, 12, I 4 6, *S B*, *Aitareya Up* I 1 1
33 *Ś B*, *Br S* II 2 31, II 3 7, *S B*, *Kena Up* I 1-2
34 *Ś B*, *Bṛhad Up* I 4 7
35 *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (1973), pp 150, 158, 164, 180 ff
36 *The Mind and Spirit of India* (1967), pp 223, 225
37 Ninian Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (1964), pp 130 ff
38 *Bṛhad Up* II 4 5
39 *Upadeśa-sahasri* II 17 80
40 *Maitreya Up* ch III, (*Thirty Minor Upanisads* 1979, p 28)
41 *Ātmabodha Up*, (op cit, pp 38-40), *Astavakra Samhita* II 6 14
42 *Aṣṭavakra Samhita* XV 16, cf ibid I 16
43 *Brhad Up* II 4 5
44 *Pañcadaśi* XII 7-9 and following
45 Ibid XII 31
46 Ibid XII 60
47 *Mbh Udyoga Parva* CXXVI 48

48 *M S* IV 240
49 *Mbh Śān P* CCLXXVII 15 ff
50 *M S* IV 238-243, *The Bıȷak of Kabır* (1986), pp 71, 88 etc
51 *Ś B*, *Br S* II 1 9, 14, 27
52 Ibıd I 4 9, II 1 3 For an excellent ınterpretatıon of Śamkara's Advaıta ın thıs context, see R P Sıngh, *The Vedanta of Śamkara—A Metaphysıcs of Value* (1949), pp 292 ff, 371 ff etc
53 *Laghu Yoga Vasıṣṭha* (1980), pp 59 ff, 241 ff, *Yoga Vāsıṣṭha, Utpattı Khanda*, ch s III-IV, (1978, vol I, pp 232 ff), ch XIII, (pp 281 ff)
54 *Laghu Yoga Vasıṣṭha*, pp 18-19, cf *Yoga Vasıṣṭha, Vaıragya Khaṇḍa*, chs XII to XXII, (vol I, pp 45 ff)
55 *Laghu Yoga Vasıṣṭha*, p 21, *Yoga Vasıṣṭha, Vaıragya Khanda*, ch XXI, (pp 77-79)
56 "When the Self ıs known, thıngs other than ıt are realızed as evıls, beıng full of defects, such as transıtorıness, paınfulenss and ımpurıty, whıle the Self ıs contrary to them" *Ś B*, *Brhad Up* I 4 7, cf, *Ś B*, *Br S* 1 3 19, II 1 22, III 4 16
57 See N K Devaraȷa, op, cıt, pp 140 ff
58 Albert Schweıtzer, *Indıan Thought and Its Development* (1980), p 60
59 *Eastern Relıgıons and Western Thought* (1958), pp 67 ff
60 *S B*, *Br S*, I 1 4, *Ś B*, *Bṛhad Up*, ıntrod to III 3 1
61 *S B*, *Brhad Up*, I 3 1, ıntrod to III 3 1, *Naıskarmya-sıddhı* I 24, 34-35, 54-55
62 *S B*, *Br S* I 1 4, *Ś B*, *Bṛhad Up* II 4 14, *S B*, *Chan Up* II 23 1, *Ś B*, *B G* II 69
63 *Ś B*, *B G* XVIII, 55, cf "Why should, therefore, one perform actıons when the result ıs known to be dısembodıedness whıch cannot be produced by actıons?" *Upadeśa-sahasrı* II 15 17
64 *Upadeśa-sahasrı* II 18 231
65 *Kaıvalya Up* 2, *Mahanarayaṇa Up* XII 14
66 *Jabala Up* 4, cf "Fındıng the world worthless, the seekers after the truth renounce the world, even before marrıage, feelıng the supermost sense of detachment wıthın themselves" *Bṛhaspatı Smrtı*, both quoted ın *S B*, *B G*, ıntrod to ch III
67 *Samkhya Karıka* 68, *Vıveka-cūdamanı* 550-551 *Pañcadaśı* II 99, 102, VI 287-288, VII 166, 263
68 *Brhad Up* IV 4 22
69 *Ś B*, *Br S* I 1 4, II 1 14, 20, *Ś B*, *Brhad Up* II 4 14
70 *Ś B*, *Br S*, ıntrod, I 1 4, *Ś B*, *Bṛhad Up* II' 1 20, II 4 13, III 9 28, *S B*, *B G* XVIII 66
71 *S B*, *Br S* II 1 22
72 *S B*, *Aıtareya Up* I 1 1
73 *Kaṭha Up* I 2 24
74 Ibıd II 3 14, cf *Brhad Up* IV 4 7, *Vıveka cūdamanı* 317
75 *Mundaka Up* III 1 5
76 *M S* VI 60
77 *Yoga Sūtra* II 3 9

78 Ibıd II 30-45
79 *Yoga Sūtra* I 33
80 *Yoga Vasıṣṭha, Mumuksu Khanda*, ch IX, (1976, vol I, pp 159-160)
81 *Yoga Sūtra*, I 1-3, I 50-51, *Laghu Yoga Vasıṣṭha* (1980), pp 59-60, 193, 198 309 ff
82 *Yoga Sūtra* I 12-16
83 *B G* VI 10 ff, Madhusūdana, *Bhagavadgıta Bhasya* VI 15, 32.
84 *S B*, *Br S* I 1 1, *Vıveka-cūdamanı* 17-27
85 *Ś B*, *B G*, ıntrod to III 4, *Naıṣkarmya-sıddhı* I 47-51
86 *Vıveka cūdamanı* 353-356
87 *Yoga Vasıṣṭha, Utpattı Khanda*, ch CXI-CXII, (1978, vol II, pp 335 ff, 341 ff)
88 *Bṛhad Up* IV 4 22-23
89 Albert Schweıtzer, op, cıt, p 44-45, 62
90 *Bṛhad Up* IV 4 23
91 *Ś B*, *Aıtareya Up* I 1 1, *S B*, *Chan Up* II 23 1
92 *Naıskaramya sıddhı* IV 62
93 *Vıveka-cūdamanı* 267
94 Ibıd 322, 324
95 Op cıt (1967) pp 225-226.
96 Ibıd, p 226
97 *Vıveka-cūdamanı* 541-546, 551-552
98 *Maıtreya Up*, ch II, (*Thırty Mınor Upanısads*, p 29)
99 *Narada-Parıvrajaka Up*, ch III, (op cıt, pp 140-142)
100 Ibıd ch III, (op cıt, p 139), *Aṣṭavakra Samhıta* XVIII 87
101 *Yoga Vasıstha, Utapattı Khanda*, ch CXVIII, (1978, vol II, pp 373 ff).
102 *Aṣṭavakra Samhıta* XVII 9
103 Ibıd XVII 16
104 Ibıd XVII 19
105 *B G* VI 5-6
106 *Yoga Vasıstha, Mumuksu Khanda*, ch V, (vol I, pp 143 ff)
107 Ibıd, *Mumuksu Khanda*, ch VII, (vol I, p 151)
108 *Pañcadaśı* VI 271
109 Ibıd VI 273
110 Ibıd VII 281-283
111 Ibıd VII 287, 290
112 *Vedanta sara* 218 226 (1978, pp 118 ff)
113 *Vıveka-cūdamanı* 37-38
114 *Chan Up* II 23 1, *Ś B* *Br S* ıntrod, I 1 4

CHAPTER V

THEO-CENTRIC MORALITY OF DEVOTIONAL SECTS

I Development of Bhakti Tradition

We have used the word *bhakti* (devotion) to characterize the Theo-centric tradition, instead of the usual term theistic, as the latter term is usually understood in a rather narrow context In fact, the entire Vedânta is Theo-centric, but we mean here specifically those schools of Vedanta which regard devotion to one Lord, and not knowledge, as the supreme means of liberation

We have earlier discussed two main traditions of Vedic-Hindu 'religio-culture', viz the ritualistic, polytheistic and world-and-life-affirming tradition of Vedas and Dharmasâstras and the rather self-centric and world-and-life-negating tradition of the philosophies of liberation A third tradition, the theistic-devotional one has flourished in Hinduism, alongside the above two traditions, since about two centuries before Christ Like the philosophies of liberation, the devotional approach is critical of the violence and externality of the Vedic ritualism and puts greater emphasis on inner attitude than on external conformation But unlike the former (the tradition of liberation), it is much more positive and world-and-life-affirming And it recommends the practice of socio-moral virtues of a very high order It is also markedly different from the popular polytheism on two counts First, it advocates one-pointed devotion to one supreme God and does not concern itself with innumerable gods of the polytheistic tradition Secondly, it asserts that this devotion to one God should be without any ulterior motive, as opposed to the polytheistic tradition wherein different gods are always worshipped with specific personal desires Even more significant contribution of the theistic-devotional (*Bhakti*) tradition lies in its reaffirmation of the vision of one Self (*Ātman*) or the Divine Lord (*Īśvara*) indwelling all living beings Its advocacy of a

positive morality and rejection of the relevance of caste distinctions are both derived from the above vision

The most important texts of Hindu theism are *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad*, *Bhagavadgitā*, *Bhāgavata* and *Visnu* Purānas and *Bhakti Sūtras* of Nārada and Śāndilya In addition, there is a very vast literature, known as Āgamas, written both in Sanskrit and Tamil, as also the Tamil collections of the songs of Vaisnava *bhakta* saints (*Ālvārs*) and Śaiva *bhakta* saints (*Nāyanārs*) Significantly, the two main theistic sects of Śaivism and Vaisnavism had their beginnings in South India There was a prolonged controversy whether the *Āgamas*, the main texts of the *Bhakti* tradition, were to be regarded as orthodox or heterodox The controversy itself is suggestive of the possible non-Aryan (Dravida?) influence on the development of the theistic sects One of the Śaiva sects, Vīra-Śaivism was openly anti-establishment and anti-brahmana and put forward quite unorthodox ideas and practices But on the whole, the entire theistic-devotional tradition is basically Vedantic in its philosophic approach

At a very early stage the theistic-devotional movement got divided into two main traditions of Vaisnavism and Śaivism Both these traditions or sects developed side by side, sometimes confronting each other, but mostly coexisting peacefully Within each tradition there were further divisions as a result of the twin processes of the synthesis of several concepts into new ones and diversification due to sectarian differences Since these sects developed and thrived during a very long period of Indian history (from about 2nd century B C to 17th century A D), it is but natural that there would be differences in the philosophy and moral approach of different sects, as also in the same sect during different periods of its history

The various sects seem to have had two parallel sources, which may explain their diversity and certain inconsistencies in them For example, Vaisnavism is based on the Vedantic texts listed above, as well as on the Pañcaratra Samhitas (which are regarded as un-Vedic by the Vedic scholars)[1] and the works of Tamil saints (*Ālvārs*), called Prabandhas (first to seventh century A D) By about the 10th century, various concepts were synthesized and a definite philosophic position was developed in a strict Vedāntic terminology The age of the Tamil *bhakta* saints

was followed by the age of Vaiṣnava *ācāryas* or teachers, like Ramānuja, Vallabha and others (between twelfth to sixteenth century) Interestingly, all of them, except Caitanya, hailed from the South. The *Bhakti* movement spread from the South to the central and western India Then it gave rise to several poet-saints of very high spiritual calibre, as Jñanesvara, Namadeva, Tukārāma and Ekanātha The Vaisnava theistic-devotional movement reached its peak in the North only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when it produced such saints as Kabīr, Nanak and Tulasīdāsa The experiences and teachings of these Vaisnava *bhakta* saints, from the *Ālvārs* of Tamil region in the early centuries of the Christian era to the poet-saints of Maharashtra and North India, express whatever is best and most profound in Hindu religion Since the period during which they lived and wrote covers the acme of Aryan culture, as well as its decline, we can assume that they did not have much influence on the politico-social conditions of the sub-continent But they always interested themselves in the masses, for whom they provided the much needed spiritual guidance and succour

Śaivism has had a similarly chequered history It also flourished in the South among the Tamil-speaking people first It owes its origins to *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad*, some Purānas and Śaiva Āgamas (which are considered non-Vedic or un-orthodox by the Vedic scholars), several works known as Śaiva Siddhanta, as also the works of Tamil Śaiva saints (*nāyanārs*), whose songs are highly respected in the South At first, some of the Śaiva sects like Vīra-Saivism maintained their separate identity and even expressed their antagonism to the Vedic 'religio-culture' The two devotional traditions, Vaisnavism and Śaivism were also antagonistic to each other for quite some time for sectarian reasons But their constant interaction and the underlying affinity of their religious experience gradually brought them closer Also, whatever their origins, almost all the theistic-devotional sects in their present form are a unique product of the Vedantic philosophy and the devotional approach in religion

II Vedāntic Theism The Concepts of God, Liberation and Devotion

In spite of all the divergence of sources and sectarian differ-

ences, the various devotional sects, excepting that of Madhva, affirm a markedly Vedāntic or monistic concept of the 'Divine' and His relation to the soul and the world

(1) The concept of God in the *Bhakti* tradition is developed in the Vedāntic framework According to the *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad*, the Divine Absolute is the Creator of the world, and 'is' also in some sense the creation [2] For the theistic-Vedanta, there is no contradiction involved in affirming the Absolute to be both the Creator and the creation The *Bhagavadgitā* affirms the transcendence of the Creator to the creation [3] At the same time, the Divine Being is the all-in-all, the source, ground and Self or Inner-controller of the entire creation and all individual selves [4] The *Visnu Purāna* affirms that the entire world is both pervaded by and exists in the Lord, who is also the Witness-consciousness or the Self of all [5] Even the comparatively independent Śaiva texts describe the 'Divine' as the *Sthala* which means the source, stay, support and end of the entire creation Ramānuja insists that in the final analysis the Absolute 'is' all this, the ultimate referent of, or the reality behind, all names and forms [6]

At the same time, the various teachers (*ācāryas*) of theistic Vedānta were opposed to the extreme monism (*Advaita*) and illusionism (*māyāvāda*) of Śamkara They sought to develop a Vedāntic world-view and concept of God which would be much more satisfying from the religious point of view than that of Śamkara According to this later theistic-devotional philosophy, the relation between the Creator and the creatures (individual souls) is such that the latter are absolutely dependent on Him, but still enjoy their separate individual existence The world is seen as a meaningful creation of the Lord The world and the souls have the Divine Being as their Self or Inner-controller and are instrumental to His will [7]

The Absolute of theistic-devotional sects is also a personal God All the philosophers of theistic Vedanta take up issue with Śamkara on his concept of an indeterminate Absolute and proclaim their God to be a perfect Person with innumerable auspicious qualities [8] He is everything, the all-comprehending Absolute, the transcendent Creator and Destroyer and the beloved Master and Friend, who is kind towards all His creatures, but more so towards His devotees

(ii) This new perception of the relation between the individual soul and the ultimate Self has resulted in the emergence of a new concept of liberation *Moksa* is neither the realization by the soul of its total aloofness and transcendence (*kaivalya*), nor its complete merger into *Brahman*, rather, it is the realization by the soul of its essential 'creatureliness' or dependence on the Lord This concept of absolute dependence or 'creatureliness' of the soul (*kārpaṇya*) emphasizes the volitional nature of the soul Liberation is therefore conceived not as a mere cognitive experience (*jñāna*), as in the philosophies of liberation, but as freedom from all passions and sin, as also knowing, loving and serving (or attaining) God

(iii) It is unanimously agreed in this tradition that the supreme goal of liberation is achieved neither through knowledge (*jñāna*), nor through rituals (*karma*), but only through true devotion (*bhakti*) Devotion is defined by Narada as 'of the nature of supreme love of God' Narada explains that this love is not of the nature of lust, because it is of the form of renunciation and complete unification with the object of love and concomitant indifference towards everything opposed to it It is the total response of the creature to the Creator, comprising all one's cognitive and conative tendencies Devotion is thus one-pointed and whole hearted love of God [9] The *Bhāgavata Purāna* contends that this devotion must be desireless, one-pointed and spontaneous like an instinct and devoid of any extraneous motives Ideal devotion is the total response of the creature to the Creator It includes the knowledge of the true nature of the soul as essentially dependent upon the Lord (*jñāna*), dispassion or detachment towards the world (*vairāgya*), as also complete self-surrender to and unmotivated love of the Lord (*bhakti*) [10] According to Ramānuja

"The means for attaining *Brahman* is *parā-bhakti* This *parā-bhakti* is of the nature of devotion which, in its turn, is aided by one's performance of one's duties, after a due understanding of the nature of supreme Reality through the scriptures "[11]

A very important feature of the ideal devotion is the absence of any ulterior motive All religious texts distinguish several kinds of devotees and put those who approach God with specific requests as much lower than those who love God for His own sake [12] For Narada, love of God is its own reward, that is, it is an end-in-itself [13] It is in sharp contrast with the ritualistic-polytheistic

tradition's emphasis on personal desire as the natural motive for the performance of all rituals This devotion is both a means and an integral part of liberation (*moksa*) The latter is conceived in theistic Vedanta as a state of perfection in which the soul enjoys the bliss of serving the Lord

As against the ritualistic tradition's insistence on the self-efficacy of Vedic rituals, or of all actions in general, and the self-reliance implied in the way of knowledge, the theistic tradition insists on man's incapacity to emancipate himself on his own and the need of God's grace To quote Narada again

"And also because God dislikes the reliance on one's own unaided self-effort and likes the complete feeling of misery due to the consciousness of one's helplessness in independently working out one's salvation, *bhakti* is greater"[14]

The concept of man's 'creatureliness' (*kārpanya*) in the *Bhakti* tradition is comparable to the creature-consciousness, considered to be the essence of all religious experience by Rudolf Otto [15] But since the entire idea is developed in a Vedantic context, there is much less emphasis here on man's sinfulness and God's *Tremendum* than in the Semitic religions, though both are recognized Instead, the ideal religious attitude is conceived as that of total self-surrender (*prapātti*) which is understood as a profound religious feeling of one's helplessness and total dependence (*kārpanya*) on the Lord It also includes complete trust in Him and the desire to do the will of God [16] The idea here is that a man cannot emancipate himself without the grace of God and that grace is available to all, but first of all to those who surrender themselves fully to God

The *Bhagavadgītā* gives a very exalted and yet simple and non-sectarian version of true devotion Lord Kṛsna advises Arjuna

"Fix thy mind on Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me Thus steadied, with Me as thy supreme goal, thou shalt reach Myself, the Self"[17]

III The Vision of God's Indwelling All and a Positive Morality Based on It

(1) The vision of 'Divine' (*Ātman-Brahman*) indwelling all living beings is the most basic vision of Hinduism The Upanisads affirm

it, so does the *Bhagavadgītā* The beauty of the latter's views lies in its theistic understanding of the Vedāntic vision See,

"The Self abiding in all beings, and all beings abiding in the Self sees he whose self has been made steadfast by yoga, (and) who everywhere sees the same

"He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he does not abandon Me, nor do I abandon him

"Whoso intent on unity worships Me who abide in all beings, that yogin dwells in Me" [18]

While no other religio-philosophical tradition has cared to develop the practical implications of this vision, two very positive and morally relevant conclusions are derived from it in the theistic-devotional tradition First, in view of the essential divinity of all beings, distinctions of caste or social class are irrelevant, especially before God Second, the worship of God has no spirituo-moral worth, unless it is accompanied by a practical realization of Him in all creatures

From the moral point of view, the most important aspect of the tradition of devotion (*bhakti*) is its universality As against the Vedic religion which was traditionally meant for the males of three 'upper' classes only, in the *Bhakti* tradition the right to worship and love one supreme God and receive His universal grace is open to all human beings, including those who belong to the lowermost rung of social hierarchy (*cāndālas*) and non-Aryans (*asuras*) [19] It is repeatedly asserted that all, irrespective of their caste or sex, are freed from mundane existence by hearing and reciting God's names and qualities No external qualification is required for practising devotion to God which is essentially a matter of inner feelings or attitude According to Nārada,

'In them (the devotees) there is no distinction based on caste or culture, beauty or birth, wealth or profession and the like "[20]

Sandilya agrees with the above

"All persons, even down to the lowest born, have equal right to follow the path of devotion They are filled with the presence of God "[21]

It is unanimously affirmed that in view of the essential divinity of all, distinctions of caste and class are irrelevant, especially in the context of devotion to the Lord The *Bhāgavata Purāna* affirms

"I rather consider a *śvapaca* (one who eats dog's meat, i e a

man of very low caste), who has dedicated his mind, his riches, his life and all unto the Lord, as worthier in point of virtue than a brāhmana who does not worship God."[22]

This was not mere rhetoric, but an ideal that was sought to be practised in everyday life. It is the miracle of the *Bhakti* tradition that in a caste-ridden society it could confer sainthood on persons who belonged to the so-called lower castes, or were even non-Hindus. Among the *Ālvār* saints of the South quite a few hailed from 'lower' castes, while one was a reformed robber. Of the Maharashtra saints, Nāmadeva and Tukārāma, the paradigms of mystico-unitive experience, were a tailor and a farmer respectively. In the north, Kabīr was a Muslim, so were many others like Dadu, Rasakhan and Rahīm, who were accepted and venerated by the Hindu masses. Raidasa, a cobbler, declares, "Caste is no consideration, that man is God's own who worships Him." Kabīr says that it is needless to ask a saint his caste, for Hindus of all castes and Muslims have alike achieved that End which is beyond all distinctions.[23] It was this perception of the worth of every human being who is devoted to God and is of righteous conduct which led to the undermining of caste distinctions among the followers of the *Bhakti* tradition. Inasmuch as they constituted a very large portion of the society, the deprecation of caste distinctions by them must have favourably influenced the society's attitude towards the so-called lower castes.

Not only does the theistic-devotional tradition value individuals who are devoted to God, but it also regards every human being, nay, every living being as sacred, a living manifestation of the 'Divine'. The Lord says in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*:

"Knowing Me to be residing in the hearts of all living beings, it naturally behoves every person to serve others with gifts, honour and equal regard, as they would unto Me."

And,

"*Īśvara* (God) is present in all beings. Thinking in this way, one should bow down before all creatures."[24]

Prahlada advises his *asura* (non-Aryan) friends:

"Direct your whole-hearted devotion to the lord Śrī Hari, who is the soul of all created beings, by considering everybody else as your own Self."[25]

In the entire theistic-devotional tradition devotion to God is

conceived in such a way that it necessarily includes love and compassion for one's suffering fellow-beings The theistic texts repeatedly exhort men to recognize the Lord indwelling all hearts and model one's behaviour according to this vision This vision negates all practical distinctions between the high and the low, the good and the bad, as all are equally divine and should be respected as such [26] According to Guru Nanak, all human beings are born out of one *Nūr* (Glory) and are servants of one God (*Khudā*), even though they may be professing different faiths, and therefore it is useless to categorize them as either good or bad

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* distinguishes three types of devotees The highest are those who perceive all creatures as permeated by the Divine Self Then come those devotees who distinguish between God, His devotees, common men and men of evil character, and entertain towards them different attitudes of love, piety, indifference etc And the lowest are those who worship God in images, but are not considerate towards others [27] The Lord further says in the same text

"I am always residing in the heart of every creature as his soul By disregarding My existence, a person would merely waste his time worshipping My idols etc "[28]

The *Bhakti* tradition believes in individual souls as existentially different both from other souls and God, and yet the perception of the basic divinity and unity of all living beings is perhaps more genuine and intense in this tradition than even in the Advaita Vedanta Nowhere in Hinduism is this vision of one Self in all presented so forcefully and its practical implications accepted so honestly as in the *Bhakti* tradition Perhaps it is so because this vision is affirmed in it, not at the theoretical level, but at the experiential level God's indwelling all and the perception of all as divine are an integral part of the God experience that is sought to be achieved through devotion The *Visnu Purāna* presents the concept of God (*Vāsudeva*) as the all-in-all, and goes on to derive a very high moral code from this vision According to it, since the Divine Being resides in the hearts of all beings, He is the Object of all sacrifices, worship and even violence, so that if one hurts others, in fact one hurts God Himself [29]

(ii) Both the philosophy of theistic Vedanta and its conception of devotion are such that the practice of morality becomes an

integral part of a man's religion The *bhakta* saints boldly assert that it becomes meaningless to affirm the vision of one Self in all at the theoretical level only and not to practise it at the socio-moral level Devotion to the Lord is understood as directed to the 'One' who resides in the hearts of all creatures The entire universe and all living beings are sanctified by the Divine presence As a result, the love of man is seen for the first time in Hindu thought as integrally related to the love of God The emphasis everywhere is not on mere theoretical assertion, but on actually living, feeling and acting according to the vision of one Self in all The Lord says in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*

"Understanding that I reside in all bodies, the person who always meditates upon Me is surely delivered from the evil habits of malice, haughtiness, entertaining disregard for others and foolishness "[30]

Moral virtue and conduct are essential to a man's quest for liberation, and thus become desirable Moral discipline is unanimously accepted as a pre-requisite for devotion (*bhakti*) According to the *Bhāgavata Purāna*,

"When the mind is free from the impurities caused by the consciousness of individuality and passions, such as lust and covetousness, then the individual (*jiva*), with the aid of the knowledge of the self, dispassion and devotion, beholds the supreme Soul "[31]

The theistic-devotional texts assert that devotion necessarily means redemption or freedom from sin or sinful tendencies It is repeatedly affirmed that devotion destroys all sins, or that the Lord enters the heart of a devotee and cleanses it of all sinful tendencies Thus, freedom from sin or victory over one's flesh is at once a pre-requisite for and a result of true devotion [32] Other religious texts of this tradition similarly derive a simple positive morality from man's love of God

"That man is a true devotee of God, who never hurts any living being (*jiva*), who serves the teachers, brahmanas and other elders, who is concerned about the welfare of all living beings as his own children, and whose mind is free of all baser passions "[33]

Virtues like universal kindness, friendliness and love are constantly exhorted in the *Bhakti* tradition, while they have found relatively much less mention in the previous two traditions At

the same time, the virtues of self-culture like self-control, forbearance and equanimity, so highly valued in the tradition of liberation, are given a new dimension in the theistic-devotional tradition by integrating them with inter-personal morality and religion Lord Krsna describes a true devotee as

"Those who having restrained all the senses, are always equanimous and intent on the welfare of all beings, they reach Myself"[34]

And,

" He, who hates no single being, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is free from attachment and egoism, to whom pain and pleasure are equal, who is enduring, ever content and balanced in mind, self-controlled and possessed of firm conviction , is dear to Me"[35]

All the *bhakta* saints of medieval India affirm an intimate connection between the love of God and the love of men, a concept immortalized in the sayings of Christ Narasī Mehata (13th century) defines a true devotee (Vaisnava) as one who knows and feels for the sufferings of others, who is ever willing to do good to others and who is free from such evil passions as egoism, anger, greed and hypocrisy This devotional song was a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi and expresses truly the spirit of *Bhakti* tradition

An important reason for this recognition of the worth of morality is the perception of devotion as a process of asymptotic approximation to God Most of the philosophies of liberation hypothesize that the stage of knowledge and freedom (*jivan-mukti*) implies a complete break from the stage of ignorance and bondage, so that there is no possibility of evil and no necessity for moral discipline, once the liberating experience is realized Though there is nothing wrong in the above stand from the mystical point of view, the theistic stand, that there can be no point of time which can be said to demarcate a complete victory over the flesh and a total transcendence of the body and mind, seems to be much more sensible and meaningful from the moral point of view As we have seen, devotion is conceived in this tradition both as a means and as an end, but mostly as an end And inasmuch as a moral way of life is an integral part of the devotional attitude, it never becomes irrelevant That is, one is expected to follow moral norms and practise rigorous ethical discipline throughout one's life It is very

significant that Nārada emphasizes ethical discipline in the very beginning of his short treatise on devotion

"For otherwise there is the risk of fall "[36]

No one is, therefore, exempt from moral norms and obligations True, a devotee of God or saint exists on a higher level of spirituo-moral experience, and is therefore revered in the Bhakti tradition as equal to God But even such saints are described, not in the classical Vedantic terminology of transcendence of all distinctions, but in that of compassion and love for all beings According to the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, the devotees of Visnu always live for the welfare of mankind and roam about the world at will to extend their mercy towards the unfortunate ones [37] Of course, mercy towards mankind chiefly refers here to the saint's duty of enlightening the ignorant and suffering mankind, or sharing with others his own inner experiences and knowledge, an ideal shared by all Indian traditions And yet, the devotee saints of the *Bhakti* tradition were compassionate and concerned about the masses in a way that was quite unprecedented in the history of Hindu India

IV *The Ambivalent Attitude of the Bhakti Tradition Towards World and Life*

Most of the works of the *Bhakti* tradition are not very philosophical in their approach and often express different and self-inconsistent points of view Thus, most works simultaneously advocate the performance of one's duties in the world and hail the virtue of total dispassion (*vairāgya*), without noticing their essential incompatibility

(1) Broadly speaking, the theistic-devotional sects have a positive or affirmative attitude towards the world and life The *Bhagavad-gītā* affirms the world to be a meaningful creation of the Lord, and adds that it is the Lord's will that the wheel of creation should be kept rotating by all men performing their respective duties [38] What is more, the performance of duty, when undertaken in a spirit of devotion and self-surrender, is glorified as a form of worship

"Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou sacrificest, whatever thou givest, in whatever austerity thou engagest, do it as an offering to Me

"Equipped in mind with the yoga of renunciation, and liberated, thou shalt come to Me"[39]

The *Bhagavadgitā's* theistic world-view and moral approach made two significant contributions to Hindu morality First, the *Gitā's* advocacy of action-in-the-world helped in restoring the balance in Hindu religio-moral approach which is often tilted in favour of world-renunciation Secondly, its advocacy of desireless action provided a much needed corrective to the excessive emphasis in the Vedic tradition on desire being the sole motive of undertaking all actions

If duties can be performed in a way so that they are not the cause of man's involvement in the world, but rather become a direct means of God-realization, then there is no reason why one should give up life-in-the world True devotion to God consists in the recognition of the divinity of all, and not in denying the reality of the world It also consists in a genuine spirit of self-surrender to the Lord, and not in outer acts, or their renunciation According to Narada,

"On the attainment of *bhakti*, or even for the attainment of it, life in the society need not be shunned, but only the fruits of all social actions are to be surrendered to the Lord, while such activities may be continued"[40]

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* contends that a householder who performs his duties in the right frame of mind is delivered from transmigratory existence through the grace of God It adds that a liberated man can and must continue performing his worldly duties

"No creature can do anything independently of God We execute the wishes of the Lord A person who has conquered his senses and passions meets with no harm, even when leading a life of the householder"[41]

During the middle ages there were Vaisnava sects, specially the *Pusti Sampradāya* of Vallabha, which encouraged their disciples to live a life of comfort and luxuries Such sects came very close to the original Vedic 'religio-culture'

In practical life too there is a marked affirmation of the world and all its values in the theistic-devotional sects The celebration of religious festivals has formed an integral part of worship since the early middle ages They are invariably occasions for lavish spending, festivities and enjoyment of rich food Even for daily

worship in the temples, the images are bedecked with rich jewellery and offered very rich food which is later on often sold outside temples Wasteful expenditure and even vulgar display of wealth are welcomed on the occasion of religious festivals The temples and *mathas* (seats of religious authority) have long been centres of concentration of enormous wealth and corruption Excepting a few norms regarding purity of body and food, no other restraints are observed by present-day devotees of the *Bhakti* tradition They are all householders who live in the society and follow their religion alongwith the other pursuits of life

(ii) On the other hand, since the very beginning of the *Bhakt* movement importance of dispassion or detachment (*vairāgya*) towards the world has been recognised Dispassion was seen as a natural result of the total absorption of the devotee in his devotion for the Divine Lord According to the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, devotion (*bhakti*) should always be combined with knowledge (*jñāna*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*), and God-realization results only when these three are combined [42] To quote Narada again

"But that state of supreme love and immortality is made possible only by giving up the objective reality of the world, as it appears to the ego-centric intellect and senses, and the consequent renunciation of attachment "[43]

Thus, we find the advocates of the path of devotion (*bhakti-mārga*) speaking the same language as that of the followers of the path of knowledge and renunciation (*jñāna-mārga* or *nivrtti-mārga*)

"A person endeavouring to conquer his heart should keep company with none and should forsake his abode Thereafter, becoming a mendicant and living alone at a solitary place, he should maintain his life by begging "[44]

And,

"Though blessed with the best of understanding, he (the ascetic-devotee) should show and behave himself as an insane boy and an idiot He should act in compliance with the whims of the people around "[45]

The *Bhāgavata Purāna* gives a detailed account of the sage Bharata who, adopting the life-style of a python (*ajagara-vrtti*), remained totally inactive and unconcerned about the circumstances of his life, not to say anything about others [46] There are some passages

in which not only attachment to one's kinsmen, but even looking after the welfare of one's dependents is decried as detrimental to the interests of true devotion [47] Renunciation of home and all one's relations is often lauded as true devotion

All mysticism is naturally transcendentalist in its approach In all mystical or true religious experience, attachment to God necessarily means freedom from attachment to, or involvement in, the world The intenser the God-experience, the greater are the chances of the devotee-saint's forgetfulness of the world around him This forgetfulness of the world was deliberately encouraged in the *Bhakti* tradition The classical texts of the *Bhakti* tradition generally understand devotion as consisting of the following nine marks or aspects (*navadhā Bhakti*) hearing narrations of the glorious deeds (*līlā*) and excellences of Visnu (God), chanting His name and reciting hymns in praise of Him, remembering Him continuously, serving Him, worshipping Him, paying obeisance to Him, practising servitude to Him, being a friend to Him, and making total self-surrender to Him [48] The emphasis in the above version of devotion is largely on the inner spirit of devotion which is to be strengthened by certain practices At the same time, devotion (*bhakti*) was considered in this tradition to be an all-time, all-absorbing occupation, involving the application of the triad of man's body, mind and speech The devotee was encouraged to devote all his mind and time to the remembrance of the Lord

From the very beginning, devotion to God was conceived in terms of being overwhelmed by emotions, shedding tears, experiencing and expressing ecstasy *Kirtana* or singing praises of God, accompanied by music and dancing, was accepted as an important aspect of the ninefold devotion Gradually, singing, dancing and (hysterical) weeping in the remembrance of the Divine Beloved became an integral part of true devotion, especially in the school of Caitanya

Detachment towards the world is associated with this kind of mysticism It is natural, though not necessary, for a mystic devotee to remain absorbed in the bliss of his inner experiences, so much so that, in the words of Narada, even a casual forgetting of God results in the anguish of separation [49] Such an absorption, in its turn, would result in a corresponding forgetfulness of the world

(iii) A perusal of the devotional literature in various Indian

languages would suggest the presence of some tension between the above two tendencies in the devotional tradition In the North we have a clear-cut division between the *Saguna* and *Nirguna bhakti* cults which profess devotion to a qualified Absolute or personal God and a transcendent, indeterminate Absolute respectively The devotees of the first cult uphold a rather down-to-earth philosophy and conceive devotion largely in terms of image worship and observance of other rituals, so that they come quite close to the spirit of the polytheistic-ritualistic tradition of the Vedas The devotees of the second (*Nirguna*) cult are much more other-worldly and esoteric in their approach to both religion and morality, and hence are closer to the spirit of the tradition of liberation Such a clear-cut division is not made in other regions of the country But it seems that a determinate concept of God is closely related to a realistic world-view and a rather less emotional form of devotion On the other hand, a concept of the 'Divine' as a transcendent and all-comprehending Reality is often associated with the practice of an intenser form of devotion which may lead to mystico-unitive experience Such an experience, in its turn, makes one supremely detached to all worldly concerns and norms[50]

We would take a slight diversion here in order to study two characteristic instances of the above two opposing tendencies in the Bhakti tradition

Tulasīdasa (16th century) is the greatest exponent of *Saguna bhakti* or devotion to a qualified Absolute in Northern India The works of Tulasīdasa seek to present an integral way of life in which true religion and moral conduct are inseparably bound together Tulasīdasa's Rama is a personal God who is extremely kind and compassionate towards all His creatures, and even more so towards His devotees[51] He affirms the transcendence of God to the creature and contends that the proper response of the creature to the Creator is one of devotion of the nature of servitude (*dāsya bhakti*) which is open to all[52] The world is perceived as a meaningful creation of the Lord and the fulfilment of one's socio-moral duties is strongly recommended Being an orthodox person, Tulasīdasa supports the caste system and even advises the worship of brahmanas[53] But being a saint of the devotional tradition, Tulasīdasa is equally sure that the purity of a man's heart and

his sincere devotion, and not his caste, alone can endear a man to the Lord Moral conduct and the practice of moral virtues, such as equanimity, kindness towards all and freedom from evil passions like anger, conceit etc , are seen as an integral part of true devotion A saint is one who is at once a paradigm of true selfless devotion to the Lord and an epitome of all moral virtues [54] Thus, Tulasīdāsa's religio-moral philosophy is extremely world-and-life-affirming, and comes very close to the Vedic-Dharmaśāstric tradition

Kabīr (15th century) was probably a senior contemporary of Tulasīdāsa But he expresses an entirely different world-view and ethos which seems to be derived from his concept of the 'Divine' as *nirguna* (indeterminate or transcendent) The most recurring theme of Kabīr's songs concerns the Divine Being (Rāma) who dwells in all hearts, while men foolishly search for Him in mosques and temples [55] No kind of ritual can be of any use in man's quest for the Creator who is within himself This profound conviction of God's indwelling all beings led Kabīr to a total condemnation of all rituals, whether Hindu or Muslim ones [56] It will be interesting to observe here that the followers of the *Saguna bhakti* tradition advocate and practise a large number of rituals, usually related to idol worship On the other hand, saints like Kabīr and Guru Nanak who belong to the *Nirguna bhakti* tradition affirm the indwelling of God and categorically reject all rituals as irrelevant in one's quest for God

The assertion of the need for the inwardization of man's consciousness in order to find the 'Divine' is closely related to a world-view and approach that sees the world as foreign to the nature of the soul and seeks to mentally transcend it Kabīr's songs repeatedly assert the transitoriness of the world and the futility of man's lonely journey through transmigratory existence [57] His transcendent mystical experience thus led him to a rather negative world-view and attitude towards the world and society That is why, we do not find in him that positive emphasis on socio-moral virtues which is so prominent in Tulasīdasa Of course, Kabīr does recommend the practice of moral virtues as kindness, freedom from evil passions etc [58] They are necessary in view of the fact that man's heart is a temple of God and therefore must be kept clean

and pure But his main concern is inward purity and not outward actions, or even social morality

There may or may not be a direct relation (as suggested by us) between a man's concept of God and his religio-moral philosophy and approach The determining factor in the world-view and moral approach of most of the *Bhakti* saints seems to be the quality and intensity of their devotion World-and-life-negation is not generally explicitly asserted in the *Bhakti* tradition But when intense one-pointed devotion or love for the Divine Being is practised, it often results in other-worldliness and a tendency to belittle and condemn the world as an obstruction in one's quest for the Divine Beloved We have innumerable legends in the Hindu folklore of the intense other-worldliness and forgetfulness of the mystic saints of the middle ages These stories prove that those who were advanced on the path of God experience often became incapable of paying proper attention to mundane matters and performing their worldly duties

Middle ages gave birth to a large number of genuine devotional mystics who were extremely pure in heart and intensely in love with God But very few people are capable of sustaining an intense religious emotion all through life Religion, for the majority, mainly consists in the assertion of some beliefs and the practice of certain rituals Though the *Bhakti* tradition put much greater emphasis on inner spirit than on outer rituals, it also offered rituals of its own as accessories to inner devotion

V Bhakti Rituals Overshadow the Spirit of Devotion

Middle ages saw the proliferation of devotional rituals which gradually overshadowed the basic spirit of devotion In the beginning, image worship was not so common, and so meditation (*dhyāna*) on God's form (*rūpa*) was advised The detailed descriptions of the physical appearance of Lord Visnu, with various jewels decorating His body and various objects in His four hands, as well as of His heavenly abode, Vaikuntha and his consort, Laksmī were frequently given in the texts for the devotees to meditate upon With the increase in the popularity of image worship, there was even greater emphasis on the Lord's physical appearance Devotion came to be mainly conceived as consisting of

serving the idol(s) through various specified rituals These rituals are very elaborate and 'physicalistic' in some of the theistic-devotional sects Thus, in the sect of Vallabha, called *Pusti Sampradāya*, the entire worship of God (i e His image) is divided into eight parts There are specific instructions as to when to get up, how to wash oneself, and then how to approach the image of God, clean the place where the image is kept, request God to get up and put Him (His image) on the proper seat, then give Him a bath and offer Him morning breakfast! There are also instructions regarding what to offer for breakfast, noon and evening meals In between the meals there are other rituals to be enacted, till at night the God (His image) is put to sleep [59] The whole series of rituals is followed to the letter in most of the Vaisnava temples Idol worship and all its associated rituals are practised in Hindu homes also And in many cases these rituals take up the best part of the day of the devotee

In Ramanuja's school devotion consists of sixteen aspects, out of which seven are concerned with ethical discipline, practice of moral virtues and proper religious attitude The remaining nine consist of purely ritualistic observances The list of sixteen aspects of devotion is headed by the requirement of food being pure and of a kind that is not prohibited Then come the stamping of one's body with the insignia of Visnu, putting a specific number and pattern of lines on one's forehead with specified coloured muds and sandal, reciting *mantras*, drinking water which has been used to wash the feet of the image, eating food offered to the image, serving the devotees of God, keeping fast on every eleventh day of the lunar calendar and putting basil (*tulasi*) leaves on the image [60]

Listening to the narratives of God is an important aspect of devotion The intensity and purity of one's piety are to be judged by one's capacity of taking interest in, and being emotionally overwhelmed by, the stories of God's incarnations on earth [61]

We would not like to sit on judgment on the religious merit or otherwise of a particular religious ritual But we are within our rights to evaluate the moral ramifications of a particular religious practice Take for example, the ritualistic listening to the stories of the exploits (*līlā*) of the Divine Being in any of His several incarnations on earth Many of these stories directly undermine

basic moral values, or are at best amoral in their import A ritualistic listening to such stories can hardly be instrumental to a higher religious experience Rather, it engenders an amoral approach to life and related socio-moral issues The rituals of image worship are particularly amoral, and it can be presumed that in a life in which they form the central concern, moral concerns and values can have only a secondary place It is in the very nature of rituals that they tend to proliferate and occupy the centre of stage in a man's life Once a man or a society starts performing rituals, the latter gradually undermine or overshadow that very inner spirit which they are supposed to symbolise or express The proliferation of rituals in a society definitely undermines the moral point of view The moral qualifications of a priest who performs elaborate ritualistic worship (*pūjā*) in a temple are never questioned by the Hindu devotees Even the devotees, who visit temples or perform ritualistic worship at home, hardly ever consider their own moral conduct as relevant for their religious activities The amoral nature of rituals thus tends to permeate the society's entire approach to life and morality

At first glance it may appear that the Hindu theistic-devotional tradition was much purer in the beginning and the multiplication of devotional rituals and Puranic mythology, as also a renewed emphasis on caste distinctions, are the results of the decadent middle ages This is true to a certain extent However, it is an over-simplification of the facts The *Bhāgavata Purāna*, which gives such an exalted version of the vision of one Self, is quite a late work Kabīr, Nanak and many others of the mystico-devotional tradition belong to late middle ages, and yet they express whatever is most sublime and exalted in the *Bhakti* tradition On the other hand, though elaborate rituals are relatively a later growth, the mythology which forms the rationale for these rituals is very old Later middle ages saw both the proliferation of rituals and a reaffirmation of the inner spirit of devotion as the essence of all religion by certain *Bhakta* saints

The emphasis on external observances, instead of inner purity, grew in later middle ages Gradually the Vaisnavas became more particular about the kind of food they ate, the manner of its cooking and the person who cooked it, than about any other religious feeling or activity Not only the food cooked by sūdras was un-

eatable, for many Vaisnavas the food cooked by anybody else (except perhaps near relations) was a taboo Both Vaiṣnavas and Śaivas grew very particular about caste distinctions and the untouchability of certain castes Both the externalistic rituals and the emphasis on caste, with its related custom of untouchability, are typical marks of an age of degeneration They would not have mattered to us so much, but for the fact that both practices are more or less common even now

The *Bhakti* tradition thus comprises several philosophical beliefs, moments of religious experience and religio-moral attitudes They give it richness and depth, and are also responsible for its decay and staleness later on The most important contributions of the *Bhakti* tradition to morality are its renewed emphasis on God's indwelling all which means the equal worth or the divinity of all beings and its perception of a very high level of morality as integral to genuine devotion

NOTES

1 *Br S* II 2 42-45
2 *Śvetaśvatara Up* IV 3 4
3 *B G* VII 24-25, IX 4, 11, XV 17-18
4 Ibid VIII 22, IX 17-18, X 20
5 *Visnu Purana*, bk I, ch 2, (1972, pp 7-8)
6 Rāmanuja, *Vedartha-samgraha* 11-15, 81-95, (1978, pp 14 ff, 65 ff)
7 Ibid 47-49, (pp 41-43), cf *Visnu Purana*, bk VI ch 5, (p 503)
8 *Śri Bhasya, Vedanta Sūtra* I 1 1
9 *Narada Bhakti Sūtra* 2, 7-10
10 *Bhag P*, bk III, ch 25, (1973, vol I, pp 244-247
11 *Vedartha samgraha* 238, (p 185)
12 *B G* VII 16-18
13 *Op cit* 30, 67
14 Ibid 27
15 *The Idea of the Holy* (1959), pp 23-24
16 Ramanuja, *Bhagavadgita Bhasya*, introd to ch VII
17 *B G* IX 34
18 Ibid VI 29-31
19 *Bhag P*, bk, III, ch 33, (vol I, p 279), bk VI, ch 16, (p 597), bk VII, ch 7, (p 647), bk XI, ch 14 (vol II, p 419)
20 Op cit 72
21 *Sandilya Bhakti Sūtra* 78
22 *Bhag P*, bk VII, ch 9, (vol I, p 656

23 *Poems of Kabır* (1972), pp 21-22
24 *Bhag P*, bk III, ch 29, (vol I, pp 264-265)
25 Ibıd, bk VII, ch 7, (vol I, p 647)
26 Ibıd, Bk XI, ch 29, (vol II, pp 475-476)
27 Ibıd, bk XI, ch 2, (vol II, p 376)
28 Ibıd, bk III, ch 29, (vol I, p 264)
29 *Vısnu Pūrana*, bk III, ch 8, (p 234)
30 *Bhag P*, bk XI, ch 29, (vol II, p 475)
31 Ibıd, bk III, ch 25, (vol I, p 244)
32 Ibıd, bk III, ch 5, (vol I, p 150), bk, VI, ch 1, (p 531), bk XI, ch 14, (vol II, pp 417-418), bk XII, ch 3, (p 500)
33 *Vısnu Purana*, bk III, ch 8, (p 234)
34 *B G* XII 4
35 Ibıd XII 13 14
36 Op cıt 12-13
37 *Bhag P*, bk III, ch s 4-5, (vol I, pp 144 ff)
38 *B G* II 47 ff, III, 10 ff, V 7 ff
39 Ibıd IX 27-28
40 Op cıt 62
41 *Bhag P*, bk V, ch 1, (vol I, p 434)
42 Ibıd, bk III, ch 25, (vol I, pp 244-247), bk V, ch 5, (pp 447-450)
43 Op cıt 35
44 *Bhag P*, bk VII, ch 15 (vol I, p 691)
45 Ibıd, bk VII, ch 13, (p 680)
46 Ibıd, bk V, ch s 5 and 9, (vol I, pp 450-451, 461-462)
47 Ibıd bk VII, ch 6, (vol I, pp 638-639), bk XI ch 17, (vol II, p 430)
48 Ibıd, bk VII, ch 5, (vol I, p 634) *Bhaktı Ratnavalı*, ch III (1979, pp 143 ff)
49 Op cıt 19
50 See author's, *The Roots of World Relıgıons* (1982), pp 132 ff, 156 ff 161 ff
51 *Rama-carıta-manasa*, *Uttara Kanda* 86 87
52 Ibıd, *Aranya Kanda* 16, 35-36, *Uttara Kanda* 45 46
53 Ibıd, *Aranya Kanda* 16, 34, *Uttara Kanda* 45
54 Ibıd, *Ayodhya Kanda* 128-131, *Uttara Kanda* 38, 46
55 *Poems of Kabır* (1972), pp 21 64-65, 82-83
56 *The Bıjak of Kabır* (1986), pp 42, 46-47, 54-55, 64, 69, 74-75, 85, 87-88, *Poems of Kabır*, pp 62 63
57 *The Bıjak of Kabır*, pp 60-61, 68 69
58 *Poems of Kabır*, pp 47, 65, 78
59 See R G Bhandarkar, *Vaısnavısm, Saıvısm and Mınor Relıgıous Systems* (1965), pp 80 81
60 See ıbıd, p 55
61 *Bhag P*, bk I, ch s 1-3, (vol I, pp 3, 6, 10), bk III, ch 13, (p 190) etc

Chapter VI

UNIVERSAL MORALITY AND THE IDEAL OF HUMAN PERFECTION

I. An Essentially Moral Approach: Some Observations

(1) *Dharma* or righteousness is perhaps the most basic concept of Hindu thought. Man is constantly exhorted to act righteously, or according to *dharma*. He is assured that both his life and eschatological destiny are determined by the moral quality of his conduct. As we know, the world order is conceived in the Hindu thought as a moral order which is vaguely understood as *rta*, *dharma* or *satya*. The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* equates *dharma* with truth and ultimate reality. *Dharma* represents the moral order of the universe which ensures the victory of righteousness over evil, so that even a weak man hopes to defeat a strong man through righteousness (*dharma*).[1] It is naively assumed that *dharma* (righteousness) or *satya* (truth) always wins in the end. This faith characterizes the Indian ethos so well that the Indian Government has accepted the phrase, *satyameva jayate* (truth alone triumphs), as the motif on the national emblem. (See chapter I, section IV. *supra*.)

At first the term *dharma* mainly referred to ritualistic duties. Gradually the concept of *dharma* became more comprehensive and came to mean all the duties of a man, both ritualistic and socio-moral. Though the ritualistic meaning of *dharma* has continued alongside, it is now primarily a moral term. The term *dharma* now comprehends all one ought to do (duty) and all one ought to be (virtue). The concepts of duty and virtue are two distinct concepts of ethics and have been treated separately in Western thought. At the same time, thinkers like Kant have emphasized their intimate relation when they have understood duty in terms of good-will or respect for the moral law. Virtue finds its fulfilment when it is expressed in moral act, and duty is an empty word unless performed with a virtuous frame of mind. Hindu moral

thought does not make any distinction between virtue and duty, because character and conduct are integrally related What one ought to do (duty) and what one ought to be (virtue) are two sides of the same coin Thus, *dharma*, by comprehending the two most basic concepts of morality, becomes an invaluable and unique concept of ethics

That one should perform one's duties with perseverance and alertness and should never slacken in their performance is the constant refrain of Hindu religious texts The manner in which the advice to follow *dharma* or righteousness is repeated over and over again in the Dharmasastras and other texts expresses the genuine moral concern of the Hindu thinkers Manu advises man

"Let him, untired, follow the conduct of the virtuous men "

"When the performance of an act gladdens his heart (conscience), let him perform it with diligence, but let him avoid the opposite "[2]

And,

"Let him always delight in truthfulness, (obedience to) the sacred law, conduct worthy of an Aryan and purity "[3]

The *Tirukkurāl* (9th century) is an ancient Tamil text which expresses a rather different religio-moral perspective than that of the Sanskrit texts But its emphasis on the need to follow the path of righteousness is very similar to that of the Dharmasastras See,

"Strive with ceaseless effort to work your way along the path of righteousness, as far as you can, in all aspects of conduct "[4]

Manu gives two reasons for his plea to follow *dharma* The first is a very simple argument, acceptable to all religions, but presented in the Vedantic terminology It says that man should not delude himself by thinking that he can sin in private, as the inner Self (*Ātman*) or the 'Divine' indwelling all hearts is the witness of all his acts and thoughts [5] The second argument of Manu is a more specific one and is based on the law of karma Manu is a firm believer in the inexorable necessity with which the fruits of a man's moral actions (*karmas*) follow him both here and hereafter Manu believes that evil deeds necessarily result in suffering for, or the destruction of, the evil doer [6] A man's good deeds are equally sure to bring happiness to him here and secure heaven or a better birth for him hereafter According to Manu, *dharma*

(merit earned through righteous conduct) is a man's best friend, as it alone accompanies him throughout his transmigratory existence [7] The law of karma guarantees that a man cannot escape the fruits of his past actions, and thereby provides a very strong motive for following the path of righteousness Manu repeatedly exhorts man to think of the possible fruits of his actions, and then diligently follow the path of *dharma* The desire for, or the fear of, the fruits of one's action is not a very commendable motive for moral action, in fact it reduces the moral worth of an action Yet, this natural desire of man has been exploited by the authors of popular religious texts for a good end, i e providing an incentive for righteous conduct [8] And an objective appraisal of the Hindu society through the ages would suggest that this pragmatic and rather un-ethical incentive for ethical conduct has mostly been effective

(ii) Traditionally, *dharma* or moral duty has been divided into two broad categories the specific or class duties that are incumbent on man by virtue of his class and role or stage of life (*varnāsrama dharma*) and the duties common to all men, irrespective of their class or other contingent circumstances (*sādhārana dharma*) While the former mainly refer to man, not as an individual, but as a member of a particular class, the latter apply to man in his capacity as an individual or a moral agent in his own right

S K Maitra contends that universal duties formed the basis for performing special or caste duties, and that whenever there was an occasion for conflict between the two kinds of duties, general or universal duties were given priority over caste duties [9] Now, we do not find any ancient thinker categorically affirming the priority or supremacy of universal duties over caste duties, though such sentiments have been voiced from time to time Yudhisthira argued that truthfulness, magnanimity, forgiveness, good character, non-violence and compassion are supposedly the characteristics of a brahmana, but if they are exhibited by a sūdra, and are not present in a brahmana, then that sūdra is not a sūdra, and that brāhmana is not a brahmana [10] But it should be remembered that Yudhisthira's stand was not vindicated in the *Mahābhārata* We think that caste duties were generally given preference to universal duties The most obvious example is that

of the universal duty of non-violence At first, *ahimsā* was regarded as the special virtue of the brāhmanas and recluses only The *Mahābhārata* abounds in passages declaring that non-violence and its allied virtues were meant for the brāhmanas only, whereas fighting wars, awarding punishments (*danda*), protecting the weak and practice of charity were the chief duties of ksatriyas Yudhisthira tried time and again to escape from the burden of his kingly duties, but was conclusively told that non-violence, friendliness to all and world-renunciation were the duties of brāhmanas and not of ksatriyas [11] Nor were the masses, vaisyas and sūdras, expected to practise non-violence A man's appreciation of the ideal of non-violence was not allowed to interfere in his caste duties, as is proved by the story of Dharmavyadha, the meat-seller sage While instructing the brahmana, Dharmavyādha gave a detailed apologetic explanation for the violence practised by him in the pursuit of his caste profession, saying that violence is an integral part of everyday life He also admitted, at the same time, that a poor sūdra like him had no choice but to sell meat,[12] suggesting that violence practised by him in his profession was not a matter of free choice

Arjuna, like Yudhisthira, was unwilling to fight, as the war was bound to result in tremendous loss of life and wide-spread suffering Lord Krsna's main argument in persuading Arjuna to wage the war was that, being a ksatriya it was his bounden duty to do so As we have seen (vide chapter III, section II *supra*), the *Bhagavadgitā* strongly advocates that all members of the society must perform their respective class duties, and no one should ever think of exchanging his class duty (*sva-dharma*), howsoever lowly that may be, for a better duty of another [13] The Dharmasastras and the *Bhagavadgitā* have given separate sets of duties for the four differentc lasses (*varnas*), and there is hardly any duty or virtue which is common to all the four lists It seems that no other moral excellence was generally expected from sūdras and women, their only (compulsory) duty being the service of the three 'upper' classes[14] and their husbands respectively [15]

And yet, this is only one side of the coin We have emphasized it only to counter any sweeping generalization regarding the primacy of universal duties in Hindu morality We think that on the whole, the Hindu thinkers put greater stress on the perfor-

mance of caste duties by all men, as from their rather limited perspective they thought that a stable and harmonious social order could be achieved only if all men adhered to their respective caste (*varna*) duties At the same time, all Hindu thinkers have persistently recommended the practice of universal moral virtues by all persons, irrespective of their caste or sex Characteristically, when a Hindu author is considering universal duties, he exalts them as the highest, thus giving the impression that according to him, universal virtues have greater religio-moral worth and must be given priority over caste duties But when the same author discusses caste duties, he advocates them with equal enthusiasm and conviction Still, there is no denying the fact that certain universal virtues are uniformly commended by most Hindu thinkers

II Universal Virtues (Sādhārana dharma)

As we have seen, the concept of *dharma* comprehends both virtue and duty Certain moral terms like non-violence, truthfulness, forgiveness etc are understood as denoting both virtues and duties

(1) Morality is not the prime concern of the Upanisadic seers, yet it forms an important part of all their discussions, both as a pre-requisite of acquiring metaphysical knowledge of *Brahman* and as something which is expected from all human beings Significantly, the morality prescribed in the Upanisads has no reference to class distinctions Unlike the Brahmanic writers, the Upanisadic seers seem to judge the worth of man on the basis of his moral conduct, rather than his caste The example of Satyakama may be cited here, who was highly admired for his truthfulness, even though he was a sūdra [16] Whenever morality is discussed in the Upanisads, it is always conceived as universal morality, that is, a morality which is applicable to all men The famous parting instructions of the teacher to the disciple (i e speak the truth, practise *dharma* and magnanimity and serve your teachers and parents) are an example of a very simple but positive code of conduct, obviously meant for the householders of all classes [17] The *Chāndogya Upanisad* has compared the entire life of a man to a sacrifice and moral virtues of austerity, alms-giving,

uprightness, non-violence and truthfulness to the gifts to the priests at the end of the sacrifice[18] The comparison of man's entire life to a sacrifice sanctifies it and also signifies that the practice of moral virtues is expected from all men at every stage of life It also indirectly negates the worth of Vedic rituals, since living righteously itself is a great sacrifice (*yajña*) Interestingly, it also negates the need to renounce the world, as righteous life is a worthy one and there is no reason to renounce it The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* recommends three cardinal virtues in the story of Prajāpati's instructions to the three classes of creatures—gods, men and demons He uttered a monosyllable—*da*—three times, and the gods understood it to mean that Prajāpati was asking them to control themselves, men understood it as an exhortation to be magnanimous, and the demons understood it as a command to be compassionate The Upanisad concludes

"That very thing is repeated by the heavenly voice in the form of thunder, as Da, Da, Da, which means control yourselves (*dāmyata*), give (*datta*) and be compassionate (*dayadhvam*) Therefore one should learn these three, self-control, giving and mercy "[19]

(ii) The authors of Dharmasastras were mainly interested in the social organization, and hence their primary emphasis was on class (*varna*) duties At the same time, all of them have recognized certain virtues or duties (*dharma*) which are applicable to, or expected from, all men Manu lists ten virtues which he calls the characteristics (*lakṣana*) of *dharma* and which should be practised by men belonging to the three 'upper' classes in all stages of life They are forbearance (*dhṛti*), forgiveness (*kṣamā*), self-discipline (*dama*), non-appropriation of others' wealth (*asteya*), cleanliness (*śauca*), control of senses (*indriya-nigraha*), intelligence (*dhi*), knowledge (*vidyā*), truth (*satya*) and non-anger (*akrodha*)[20] On another occasion he lists non-violence (*ahimsā*), truth, non-appropriation of others' wealth, cleanliness and control of senses as the duties of all the four classes (*varnas*)[21] While the first passage limits the practice of universal virtues to the three upper classes, the second understands universal morality in its true perspective, as referring equally to all men The two lists can be combined into a more balanced and comprehensive list of universal virtues Though Manu's main concern is the preserva-

tion of the social order, his list of universal virtues surprisingly consists mainly of virtues of self-culture and lacks those of interpersonal morality

Manu also offers some moral maxims or guiding principles of human conduct In a way, they express his own moral point of view or the Vedic-Dharmasāstric ethos much better than the above lists of universal virtues *Dharma* is declared as the guiding principle of all human conduct At the same time, the other two goals or values of *artha* (prosperity) and *kāma* (desire fulfilment) are not to be rejected The latter two are to be pursued under the guidance of the principle of righteousness Manu thus advises man

"Let him say what is true, let him say what is pleasing, let him utter no disagreeable truth, and let him utter no agreeable falsehood, that is the eternal law "[22]

"Let him avoid (the acquisition of) wealth and (the gratification of his) desires, if they are opposed to the sacred law, and even lawful acts which may cause pain in the future, or are offensive to men "[23]

"There is no sin in eating meat, in (drinking) liquor and in carnal intercourse, for that is the natural way of created beings, but abstention brings great rewards "[24]

The above norms of conduct are set forth from a pragmatic point of view They are supposedly meant for the three 'upper' classes But their very simplicity suggests that they are meant as universal norms of morality, and therein lies their worth They are not commonplace, only they are not impracticably idealistic

Generally, the ancient Hindu concept of universal morality comes to us in the form of an extremely unsystematic enumeration of certain moral virtues which are asserted to be applicable to all men Significantly, most of these universal virtues pertain to individual self-culture It seems that the universal virtues are mostly understood by Hindu thinkers as complementary to the performance of caste duties They are concerned with the inner spirit of man, while caste duties are concerned with the external acts They are, therefore, aptly called *ātma-guna* (qualities of the soul) by Gautama, meaning that they should characterize the inner self of a righteous man (man of *dharma*), whatever his outer way of life or profession Gautama lists eight excellences of

the soul (*ātma-guna*)—kindness towards all (*dayā sarva-bhūtesu*) forbearance (*ksānti*), non-hostility (*anasūyā*), cleanliness (*śauca*), quietude (*anāyāsa*), doing good acts or behaving auspiciously (*mangalam*), not asking for favours or freedom from avarice (*akārpanya*) and freedom from covetousness (*asprhā*) He adds that mere fulfilment of religious duties is useless, unless it is accompanied by the practice of these universal virtues [25] Thus, Gautama's list of moral virtues, unlike that of Manu, contains several inter-personal virtues, as kindness, non-hostility and good conduct

Two other lists of moral virtues come from Yajñavalkya The first includes non-injury (*ahimsā*), purity (*sauca*), control of the senses (*indriya-nigraha*), charity (*dāna*), mercy (*dayā*), self-restraint (*dama*) and forbearance (*ksānti*) [26] The second list consists of the virtues of patience (*dhrti*), absence of pride (*ārjavam*), intelligence (*dhi*), absence of anger (*akrodha*), spiritual knowledge (*vidyā*), modesty (*hri*), non-appropriation of others' property (*asteya*) and restraint of senses (*indriya-nigraha*) This second list of moral excellence is accompanied by a most profound advice that a man should not treat another in a way in which he would not like to be treated himself [27]

(iii) Moral discipline and moral conduct are equally important for the thinkers of philosophic systems But their treatment of moral matters are not any more systematic than that of the authors of Dharmasastras or other religious texts Prasastapada enumerates faith in spiritual truth, non-violence, seeking the good of creatures, truthfulness, non-appropriation of others' property, sexual continence, purity of motive, abstaining from anger, personal cleanliness, eating purifying substances, devotion to the deity, fasting and non-neglect of religious duties as the duties of all men [28] The inclusion of non-injury and seeking the good of the creatures provides some saving grace to this otherwise unimaginative and confusing list of moral duties or virtues

Vatsyayana's discussion of moral virtues and vices is relatively more positive and comprehensive, but even this lacks clear classification or analysis His treatment of the subject has been discussed in detail by S K Maitra and Cromwell Crawford,[29] and so we would only give a summary of his views here According to Vatsyayana, cruelty, theft, forbidden sexual indulgence, speaking

untruth and speaking ill of others, hostility and ill-will towards others, covetousness and irreverence are the main moral vices or sources of moral evil As against them, universal virtues that constitute moral perfection are charity (*dāna*), helping the distressed (*paritrāna*), serving the elders (*paricārana*), speaking truth (*satya*), speaking with a view to good (*hita-vacana*), agreeableness of speech (*priya vacana*), reciting the Vedas (*svādhyāya*), kindness (*dayā*), indifference to material well-being (*asprhā*) and piety (*śraddhā*) [30] The above list contains several inter-personal virtues of a high moral order, such as charity, kindness and even helping others (At the same time, we should not read too much meaning in the word *paritrāna*, which probably did not mean actively helping the distressed)

The well known *yamas* and *niyamas* of the *Yoga Sūtras*[31] are normative rules of conduct which are meant to be practised by all persons They present a rather limited concept of morality, both in its vision and scope They mainly aim at individual self-culture, and do not contain any positive inter-personal virtues or norms (See chapter IV, section VI *supra*) As we have seen earlier, the *Yoga Sūtras* also suggest four highly positive moral virtues, viz friendship towards all (*maitri*), mercy towards the suffering (*karunā*), gladness at the good of others (*muditā*) and indifference towards evil persons (*upeksā*) [32] They are very positive interpersonal virtues or feelings But unfortunately they were mostly understood as aids for self-discipline, and were not generally meant for active practice Any future attempt at the reconstruction of a Hindu philosophy of morals must give them more specific content and also assign to them a more central place in its concept of moral perfection

(iv) We find such lists of ideal moral virtues throughout the Sanskrit literature, especially in the Epics and Puranas All such lists show want of any systematic thinking and even suggest that their authors had other priorities and were quite casual about the task of providing a universal ideal of human perfection

The greatest and most fascinating source of Hindu morality, both as taught and as lived, are the two Epics Though both the Epics are committed to a caste-oriented social organization and strongly advocate the performance of class (caste) duties by all, their admiration is reserved for truly moral virtues Typically,

all discussions of moral perfection in the Epics are highly unsystematic, repetitive and sometimes even mutually inconsistent Only a very careful and comparative perusal of the various descriptions of human perfection, given in the Epics and other religious texts, can give us a general idea of the virtues that were admired most

We quote here a typical enumeration of virtues comprising moral perfection from the *Bhagavadgitā*

"Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and yoga, magnanimity, self-restraint, study of scriptures, austerity, uprightness, non-violence, truth, absence of anger, renunciation, serenity, absence of enmity, compassion for creatures, non-covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, absence of hatred, absence of pride these belong to one born of divine nature "[33]

The *Mahābhārata* offers innumerable such lists of moral excellences or ideal universal virtues, often out of all context, and always without any attempt at a clear formulation of the moral point of view We would quote here a few at random One such list enumerates forgiveness, patience, non-violence, equableness towards all creatures, truthfulness, simplicity, control of the senses, dexterity, gentleness, sense of propriety, non-miserliness or magnanimity, non-anger, contentment, not paying any attention to the defects of others, non-greed, compassion, not asking for favours and speaking gently and pleasantly [34] On another occasion, it gives detachment towards sense objects, self-control, being equable in happiness and suffering, truthfulness, magnanimity, kindness, dutifulness, patience, non-violence, doing good to others, always adhering to the path of *dharma*, as also freedom from desire, anger, attachment, avarice and egoism as the characteristics of an ideal man of high moral character (*sādhu*) or a man of *dharma* [35] The vices that lead to sin are enumerated as attachment (*rāga*), aversion (*dvesa*), delusion (*moha*), greed (*lobha*), as also egoism, anger, languidness, enmity and ignorance [36] These are the sources of sin or evil which are rightly perceived as within our own selves Sin, thus, consists in succumbing to one's lower tendencies, and moral perfection naturally means victory over them

Purānas give similarly long lists of virtues in which genuine

moral qualities like truthfulness, kindness, charity, forgiveness, dutifulness, asceticism, self-control and contentment are juxtaposed with such amoral qualities as sharpness of intellect and beauty [37]

Another Hindu text which considers morality in its true universal perspective, i e as applicable to all persons, is the Tamil work, *Tirukkural* It offers a large number of moral axioms which are universal in application and highly positive in nature Though there is no systematic thinking behind them, the axioms have immense practical value from the point of view of inter-personal morality More importantly, righteousness (*dharma*) is conceived in the above text in terms of non-violence, compassion and fellow-feeling We quote here a few verses

"Those who follow the principle of universal love and are adorned with mercy towards all living creatures are called godly "

"Imagine thyself before those more powerful than thou art, when about to treat harshly those more weak than thyself"

"To suffer patiently and cause no pain and to cause no injury to others constitute *tapas* or penance "

"It is the considered belief of the sages of spotless purity that even when out of malice evil is done to a person, he ought not to do in return anything evil "

"Whatever is known to be bitter pain by his own experience should not be done to others "

"Share your meal with the needy Protect every living being This is the chief of moral precepts "[38]

This popular Hindu morality is a unique admixture of the norms and virtues, affirmed by all the previous religio-philosophical traditions of India It is un-systematic and often includes self-contradictory elements It is highly dogmatic also and contains very reactionary ideas, such as the idealization of *sati* (the widow who burns herself) But it has some very positive ideas also First, though it accepts the traditional emphasis on caste duties, it puts much greater stress on the practice of certain basic moral virtues by all human beings, irrespective of caste and other considerations Puranas and Epics are mainly concerned with the narration of stories about legendary heroes and heroines who were necessarily the epitomes of all moral virtues and righteousness These heroes have earned the admiration of Hindu masses for centuries,

not because they performed their respective caste duties, which of course they did, but because they personified certain universal virtues, such as truth (Hariscandra), magnanimity (Karna) and dutifulness towards parents (Śravanakumara) What is more, the virtues exemplified by them are expected to be practised by all men That is to say, the morality advocated in the Epics and Purānas is mostly a universal morality, meant for all human beings [39]

Secondly, this popular morality generally affirms a more intimate relation between the religious quest and moral conduct than the two earlier traditions of the way of rituals (*karma-kānḍa*) and the way of knowledge (*jñāna-mārga*) The *Mahābhārata* declares the virtues of kindness, forgiveness, non-violence, quiescence, truthfulness, absence of enmity, anger and ego, forbearance and withdrawal from mundane actions as the means of the realization of *Brahman* [40] The *Bhakti* treatises are all the more eloquent in their praise of such virtues as non-violence and kindness and declare that the Lord is propitiated by the practice of such virtues [41] Both the *Bhagavadgitā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāna* declare that to consider all creatures as oneself constitutes true devotion to God By linking morality with devotion to God[42] the *Bhakti* tradition has given it prestige and a new meaning In a country where religion holds the central place in a man's life, the assertion of the moral way of life as an integral part of religious quest provides the most effective incentive for pursuing a moral way of life

It is obvious from the above discussion that though Hindu thinkers have recognized, admired and recommended the entire spectrum of spirituo-moral virtues, they have never attempted their classification or systematic enumeration While some virtues are common to all such lists, others are expected from different classes of persons, such as renunciants and householders

Various religio-moral perfections, admired by the ancient Hindus, can be divided into two classes, viz virtues of self-culture and inter-personal virtues Self-control, withdrawal of the senses and mind from the outer world, patience, forgiveness and forbearance etc are the virtues of self-culture which were originally conceived as the characteristic virtues of renunciants Fulfilling all one's socio-moral obligations, magnanimity and kindness are the chief virtues of social (inter-personal) morality, mainly expected from householders At the same time, this classification is often

misleading for various reasons First, even though the various virtues of self-culture have been originally developed in the context of the quest for liberation, most of these virtues (with the exception of a few extreme ones) are expected from all men, though in varying degrees of rigour Secondly, most of the virtues of self-culture, like forgiveness, non-violence and kindness, can be meaningfully practised in a social context only, and cannot possibly be exercised by a renunciant who has totally cut himself off from the world That makes them more or less inter-personal virtues Thirdly, the virtues which would definitely be classified as inter-personal ones, like kindness, forgiveness and doing good to others, are often conceived in such a way that they become passive qualities of the soul which are nurtured for the sake of self-purification, or as an indirect means of liberation This highly vague and un-systematic approach made the amalgamation of the two traditional moralities easier, leading to a general synthetic Hindu morality

III The Ideal of Human Perfection and Some Cardinal Virtues

Like Hindu philosophy, Hindu morality is a very complex and composite one The Hindu concept of human perfection, thus, actually comprises several rather heterogeneous concepts of moral excellence We are already familiar with two such concepts, viz the ideal of manliness, self-assertion and world-and-life-affirmation and the ideal of world-renunciation and transcendence of all mundane desires and passions Gradually there has emerged a third synthetic concept of human perfection that generally comprehends all the virtues and values of the previous two traditional ideals

(1) In the first or Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition, an ideal man is expected to personify three main virtues of truth (*satya*), charity (*dāna*), and duty (*dharma*) Truth is the one virtue that is unanimously included in all descriptions of human perfection Truth also expresses the ontological moral order that governs the world, so that a moral agent acts from the faith that truth always prevails, or the truthful or righteous cause always triumphs in the end We shall have occasion to consider it later

The virtues (duties) of charity and dutifulness are more typical

of the first or Brāhmanical tradition As we know, this tradition expresses a very positive and world-and-life-affirming ethos and its concept of a perfect man refers mainly to a householder A man is expected to earn wealth so that he can practise charity The virtue or duty of charity is further associated with the affirmation of a man's indebtedness to various sections of society and his responsibility towards the maintenance of those of his fellow beings who cannot maintain themselves, such as travellers, teachers, mendicants and student-celibates, as well as his dependents and old relations This charity is generally conceived on a very wide canvas It does not merely mean giving some token gift to brāhmanas, rather it consists in actually sharing one's food and wealth with all living beings (*samvibhāga*) [43] The *Bhāgavata Purāna* goes as far as to say that the embodied beings can lay claim to only as much wealth as is enough to fill their belly and keep their body and soul together Those who want more are pilferers It adds that a householder should look upon all beings as his sons, as there is very little difference between his children and other beings [44] The *Mahābhārata* even advises man to put aside one-third portion of his income for such philanthropic works, as digging wells, planting trees etc According to the Epic, the only right use of wealth is providing for the poor and the destitute, apart from which its accumulation is detestable [45]

The most important constituent of this first ideal is devotion to duty (*dharma*) An ideal man (or householder) is expected to exercise full control over his senses and mind, never to pursue self-interest at the cost of others, to pay his debts to the teachers and parents, to procreate and look after all his dependents, as also to perform all his caste duties It is an ideal of manliness, personal effort, doing one's duties against heavy odds and willingly sacrificing everything, even one's life, for the sake of *dharma* The ideal man is not one who devotes himself to the pursuit of his salvation, but one who accepts his obligations and fulfils them with perseverance and forbearance Personal sufferings and trials do not deter him from the path of duty Moreover, this ideal of human perfection is conceived in a social context Its most valued virtues are inter-personal ones

The concept is developed at two levels, first, as an ideal which is both universally applicable and within the reach of common

man and second, as an extreme example of human perfection Tulādhāra and Dharmavyādha are presented in the *Mahābhārata* as ideal householders These men did not perform any great deeds, but were still the pillars of society and were admired and respected for their dutifulness and inner poise The ideal of *dharma* in this tradition is thus not an unattainable ideal, but one to be realized by common man in everyday life The ideal of conduct presented in the Dharmasāstras and other religious texts reminds us of the rule of the mean of Aristotle The ideal or good conduct is generally defined as *śila* which is explained as acting in a way (through body, speech and mind), so as not to cause any injury to any person, and being kind and magnanimous towards others Simply stated, *śila* is that conduct for which one need not feel ashamed before others [46] The ideal of *śila* is closely associated with the ideal of social culture (*śistācāra*) Even a casual reader of Sanskrit literature would be impressed by the very high level of social culture maintained at all levels by different legendary characters

The above idea was at first conceived in a simple pragmatic context But the folklore and possibly the hightened moral sensitivity of the Hindus of post-Buddhist era gave it a new dimension The greatest heroes of Hindu folklore are those who sacrificed everything for the sake of the standards of moral conduct they had set for themselves We may recall here the discussion of moral virtues by W M Urban He distinguishes three kinds of virtues, the objective, the inter-personal and the subjective It is his contention that the virtues of the first two types, though essential for morality, are limited in their conception and scope, and it is in the field of subjective morality alone that one can achieve heights of moral perfection, inconceivable in other contexts [47] His views are vindicated by a study of Indian folklore

Karna is the legendary paradigm of the virtue of charity It is said that he was born with a protective shield and earrings which were part of his body, and that he was invincible as long as he was wearing them Yet, he willingly tore them off his body and gave them to Indra who begged for them in order to ensure that Karna could not kill his (Indra's) son, Arjuna Karna hated Arjuna and his honour demanded that he should defeat

Arjuna who had insulted and humiliated him time and again Karna also knew that deprived of his protective armour, he would not be able to achieve his life's ambition And yet, he gave them to Indra, because he could not refuse anything asked of him [48] Likewise, King Śivi cut his body up and gave it in bargain to a vulture in order to save a little pigeon who asked for his protection And King Dadhīci gave his bones so that a weapon could be forged out of them which alone could destroy the enemies of gods The *Mahābhārata* recounts the story of an otter, one half of whose body was golden It so happened that during a severe draught a brāhmana's family was starving One day the brāhmana could manage a small quantity of food which was divided into four portions for the four members of the family Just then a guest came to their door demanding to be fed All members of the family gave their share of food to the guest, knowing fully well that without it they would not be able to survive The otter rolled over the few grains of the left over food and found that that part of his body had turned golden When the same otter came to the great sacrifice (*yajña*) of Yudhisthira, he found that it was ineffective in transforming the remaining part of his body, as he had hoped [49] The story clearly implies that the sacrifice by the brahmana family was far greater than that of the great king Yudhisthira

Keeping one's promise at all costs and protecting a person who has taken refuge with oneself are other highly cherished values of this tradition Thus, Rama willingly surrendered his legitimate right to his father's kingdom and went to the forest, just to honour a promise given by his father to his stepmother Similarly, Hariscandra gave up his entire kingdom and even sold himself and his wife to keep his promise to a brahmana During the middle ages many a Rajput king sacrificed his entire army and kingdom to protect someone who had taken refuge with him Such sacrifices do seem disproportionate and even irrational, and yet there is a certain grandeur in these immense sacrifices, willingly undertaken for the sake of one's ideal, which expresses a very high level of moral perfection

(ii) The second traditional ideal of human perfection belongs to the tradition of world-renunciation As we have seen (vide chapter IV, sections I and II *supra*), this tradition affirms the

self as a transcendent pure-consciousness and the world as transient and full of suffering It is rightly observed by the thinkers of this tradition that it is not the world, but man's desire for mundane objects that binds him to the transmigratory existence The sufferings of this world affect that person most who forgets the essentially transcendent nature of his inner self and identifies himself with his body and mind It is, therefore, advised that in order to avoid all sufferings, a man must transcend his ego or empirical personality and become totally detached to the vicissitudes of life A man of knowledge or one who has achieved perfection in this life (*jivan-mukti*) is expected to be totally detached towards the outside world and equable or composed towards all beings and under all circumstances Most of the virtues of this tradition can be summed up under the two heads of dispassion (*vairāgya*) and equanimity (*samabhāva*)

Characteristically, this ideal of a passionless sage is also developed by Hindu thinkers at two levels While the philosophers of the tradition of liberation, especially the post-Śamkara Advaitins, present the ideal of a liberated man in an extreme form, the same concept is put forward in a milder version by the religious texts, especially the *Bhagavadgitā* (See chapter IV, section VII *supra*) We would concentrate here on the ideal of a passionless sage, as found in the religious texts, as we feel that the ideas in these texts have exercised much greater influence on the Hindu mind than the more esoteric views of the philosophic schools According to the *Bhagavadgitā*

"When a man, satisfied in the Self alone, by himself completely casts off all the desires of the mind, then he is said to be one of steady knowledge (*sthitaprajña*)

"He, whose heart is not distressed in calamities, from whom all longing for pleasure is departed, who is free from attachment, fear and wrath, is called a sage, or a man of steady knowledge

"Whoso without attachment anywhere, in meeting with anything, good or bad, neither rejoices, nor loathes, his knowledge becomes steady "[50]

And,

"The same in honour and disgrace, the same towards friends and enemies, abandoning all undertakings, he is said to have crossed beyond the qualities of nature (*gunātita*)" [51]

A perfect man is also supposed to possess the knowledge of ultimate truth which is variously understood as discriminative knowledge (*viveka-jñāna*) or the knowledge of the Self (*Ātma-jñāna*) in different schools of philosophy But in all of them it has transcendentalist implications and provides the *raison d'etre* of the creed of renunciation

A sense of complete freedom from all restraints, involvements, miseries and obligations also characterizes the renunciant It involves keeping oneself away from the rest of the world and all one's fellow beings Yudhisthira describes this attitude as that of a person who stands on a hill top and perceives the people in the plains in a detached way [52] A renunciant really transcends this world and all its limitations and distinctions (including caste rules) [53] Theoretically, all Vedantic works concede the possibility of action for a man of renunciation But the detachment which is expected from a renunciant is so complete that any act that he may possibly perform would be mechanical and even amoral Moral actions presuppose moral distinctions and owning of the responsibility for one's actions, and both seem to be denied in this ideal, as is evident from the following passage of *Bhagavadgitā*

" 'I do nothing at all', thus would the knower of truth think, remaining steadfast, though seeing, hearing, touching remembering that senses move among sense objects "[54]

In its more extreme form, the ideal expresses not only a rejection of all socio-moral obligations, but also of all norms of conduct *Jada* Bharat, who did absolutely nothing and remained prostrate in his own filth, is often cited as the paradigm of absolute detachment [55]

Certain moral virtues, such as control of the senses (*indriya-nigraha*) and total self-control (*dama*), quiescence (*śama*), are closely related to the ideal of absolute detachment and are greatly emphasized in the concept of a liberated man Non-violence is another important virtue The ideal of non-violence seems to have been directly borrowed from the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism, along with their creed of world-renunciation That is why, it was first accepted as a virtue that characterizes the renunciants and was only gradually acknowledged as a universal virtue It is one of the most cherished virtues

(or values) of later Hinduism, and we shall discuss it in greater detail later Some other virtues that are closely related to the ideal of non-violence, such as forbearance, forgiveness and equanimity, also constitute the ideal of a man of renunciation,[56] or a liberated man They are seen as expressions of complete detachment towards, or transcendence of, all mundane interests and concerns which necessarily characterize an ideal man in this tradition

(iii) As we have seen (vide chapter I, section III *supra*), these two traditional moralities and their respective ideals of human perfection were probably developed in independent circles, but there was constant interaction between them from the beginning As a result of this interaction, both traditions have been modified to a certain extent, and have come closer to each other Several attempts have been made to synthesize these two traditional moralities Of all such attempted syntheses, that of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the most meaningful and convincing Though in some passages the *Bhagavadgītā* seems to advocate extreme detachment, on the whole, it favours the ideal of desireless performance of all one's duties This ideal seeks to synthesize the previous two concepts, emphasizing the performance of all one's socio-moral duties and absolute detachment and equanimity towards all things and beings respectively The *Gītā* believes that detachment and equanimity are a matter of mental attitude and have nothing to do with man's outer mode of life It contends that in order to achieve this state of detachment and mental transcendence, one need not give up a life of action-in-the world No one can survive without action, and the only choice consists in whether one confines oneself to actions aimed at the maintenance of one's body, or performs other duties also [57] The *Gītā* assures us that the world order, including the division of society into different classes, is ordained by the will of God, and it is the Lord's will that man should do his allotted work, so that the wheel of creation is kept rotating and the social order is not disturbed [58] Having argued for the inevitability and advisability of a life of action, the *Gītā* further assures us that the performance of one's duties, undertaken in the right frame of mind, does not result in one's involvement in the world

"Satisfied with what comes to him by chance, rising above

the pairs of opposites, free from envy, equanimous in success and failure, though acting, he is not bound "[59]
And,

"He who is equipped with yoga, whose mind is quite pure, by whom the self has been conquered, whose senses have been subdued, whose self has become the self of all beings, though doing, he is not tainted "[60]

The *Bhagavadgitā's* option of desireless action seems to be the perfect answer to the common fear of involvement in the transmigratory existence Also, the detachment that the *Gitā* generally upholds, excepting a few passages, is neither as extreme, nor as negative, as that of the later Advaita works Vidyaranya rightly points out that the *Bhagavadgitā* uses the term 'like a detached person (*udāsinavat*)' which means that absolute detachment is not required by it [61] Its ideal of equanimity or desirelessness refers mainly to the mental attitude of the agent and does not mean disowning one's duties and social obligations The theism of the *Bhagavadgitā* further transforms the dry and negative ideal of world-renunciation and absolute detachment towards one's fellow beings into a much more positive ideal of performance of all one's duties in a spirit of total self-surrender to the Lord [62] It seems that while the ideal of absolute detachment and world-renunciation is closely related with a monistic or transcendentalist approach to world and life, the ideal of a full life-in-the world is more easily reconciled with a polytheistic world view In contrast, the ideal of doing one's duty desirelessly seems to be more in conformity with a theistic approach to life, at least in the Indian context

The *Mahābhārata* presents the same ideal independently According to it, renunciation of the world is easy, but not desirable, and an ideal renunciant (*samnyāsin*) is one who lives in the world, performing all his actions in a spirit of detachment and equanimity It is useless for an intemperate man to go to the forest, and it is equally useless for a man of tranquillity and self-restraint to go there, as wherever the latter lives, his life is as austere and meritorious, as that of a forest-dweller [63]

According to Manu, an ideal householder has complete control over his senses and mind, as well as his desires and passions He is also very quiet, forbearing, forgiving and equable towards

all beings [64] And of course, he performs all his socio-moral and ritualistic duties without any selfish motive Some of the virtues that constitute the ideal of a householder in Manu are common in his concept of an ideal renunciant Thus, Manu's concept of an ideal householder seeks to comprehend and synthesize the first two ideals

But in spite of all these attempts at synthesis, the two ideals of an active life-in-the world (*pravrtti*) and its renunciation (*nivrtti*) could never be fully integrated As we have seen above, certain passages of the *Bhagavadgītā* itself give a rather extreme version of the ideal of detachment The Advaitins could argue for a life of inaction and absolute detachment on the basis of such passages In a way, this ideal of desireless action was never developed at a philosophical level till the modern times, when B G Tilak and Sri Aurobindo presented it in a forceful manner [65]

(iv) At the same time, there was a continuous interaction between the two religio-moral traditions which naturally resulted in an intermixing of the two valuational approaches, resulting in the general acceptance of certain cardinal virtues by all Hindu thinkers The Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition, being the more receptive of the two, absorbed most of the virtues and values of the second tradition Gradually certain virtues were accepted as having more intrinsic worth than others and came to be included in all the descriptions of an ideal or perfect man. The cardinal virtues which constitute this vaguely formulated synthetic ideal are truth, magnanimity, self-control, non-violence and compassion

Truth, perhaps, is the most important cardinal virtue of Hinduism It is unanimously recognized and cherished in all the traditions of Hinduism Both the *Manusmrti* and the *Mahābhārata* sing homilies of truth as the highest *dharma* and the source or basis of all other virtues According to Manu, being guided by truth in one's actions is the greatest virtue, while acting in disregard to it is the greatest sin Tempering truth or justice finally leads to the destruction of the sinner [66] To be truthful means never to indulge in any kind of lies or slanderous and malicious talk and to adhere to the highest measure of rectitude in one's conduct It also means knowing the metaphysical nature of reality (*satya*) and acting in harmony with it

Charity (*dāna*) is the second cardinal virtue which has been unanimously recognized in Hinduism Like truth, it originated in the Vedic tradition, but has been whole-heartedly accepted in subsequent Hinduism Epics and Purānas praise the virtue of charity endlessly It is definitely an inter-personal virtue which emphasizes man's obligation towards his fellow beings, though it falls much short of the ideal of love and service of others

Self-control (*dama* or *indriya-nigraha*) is the third most important virtue of this composite ideal It is more or less a class name for a group of related virtues like control of mind and senses, detachment towards sense objects or quiescence, forbearance, egolessness and absence of evil passions like anger, avarice etc All these qualities are included in almost every description of an ideal man in later Sanskrit literature Though self-control was originally conceived in the context of self-culture, it gradually came to be conceived in a markedly social or inter-personal context Thus, an ideal man, whether he is a recluse or a householder, is expected to be immensely patient, forbearing and completely free from any negative feelings like anger, enmity and ill-will towards other beings [67]

Ahimsā (non-violence) is the fourth cardinal virtue of Hinduism Non-violence, along with truth, forms the basis of the entire super-structure of Hindu 'religio-culture' It seems to be fairly certain that the value of non-violence was introduced into Hinduism as a result of the direct influence of the heterodox sects of Buddhism and Jainism At first the value of non-violence was only conditionally accepted as a virtue which characterizes a certain class of persons, viz the renunciants Gradually non-violence came to be accepted as the guiding principle of life or the supreme universal virtue—*ahimsā paramo dharmah* [68] The acceptance of non-violence resulted in the rejection of Vedic sacrifices involving violence [69]

At first glance the ideal of *ahimsā* seems to be a limited and negative concept Probably it was so in the beginning But gradually it acquired a richer and profounder meaning *Ahimsā* is an all-encompassing ideal, both in its conception and scope Mahatma Gandhi's interpretation of *ahimsā*, as never hurting another in any way and harbouring positive feelings of friendliness

and good-will towards all, including one's enemies, is not something new, but is rather a true interpretation of the concept of *ahimsā* The ideal of *ahimsā* means that a man must not ever hurt others physically or mentally, or cause fear in them, and must never indulge in feelings of animosity or ill-will towards others *Ahimsā* or non-violence is also giving the gift of fearlessness (*abhaya-dāna*) to all, which means that one should behave so as not to cause fear in any creature The ideal man is repeatedly described as one who is not afraid of others and who is not a source of fear to anyone else [70] Not only must one not cause physical injury to another, one must desist from causing any mental agony or anxiety in another person Absolute harmlessness and friendliness towards all beings are expected from a man of non-violence

Ahimsā and its allied virtues are further integrated with the religious quest for one's liberation by the theistic-devotional tradition and popular Hindu texts Thus, the *Mahābhārata* contends that a man, who causes no harm to others through body, mind and speech and who never thinks ill of others, reaches the supreme *Brahman* [71]

The real worth of the ideal of *ahimsā* lies in its exceptionally broad application All living beings, from gods and men to smallest creatures, are *jivas* The term *jiva* is generally used for the individual soul, but basically it means one who has got life breath (*prāna*) The ideal of *ahimsā* is applicable to all and in all circumstances of life Nowhere in the history of human thought has the animal kingdom been treated as deserving equal consideration and kindness as human beings, as in the concept of non-violence The Aryans were enthusiastic meat eaters But once the ideal of non-violence was accepted, they strove hard to give up meat eating on the sole consideration that animals who are killed for meat have the same life as humans [72] Not only must the animals not be killed, they must also not be beaten or treated cruelly in any way [73]

Closely associated with the ideal of *ahimsā* is the virtue of compassion or kindness to all beings (*bhūtadayā*) Universal kindness may be regarded as the fifth cardinal virtue of Hinduism According to the *Mahābhārata*, kindness is the highest duty, the highest norm of morality that must govern our entire conduct

The *Mahābhārata* hails the character which is governed by kindness Such a character necessarily expresses itself in actions which aim at the good of all It adds that ideal persons are those who are self-restrained, kind towards all and ever ready to sacrifice their lives for the good of others [74] The *Bhagavadgītā* describes an ideal devotee as one who is kind and friendly towards all [75] The *Manusmrti* describes an ideal forest-dweller as one who is non-violent and kind towards all beings [76] Desisting from any activity which may cause some injury to any living being and desiring the good of all beings[77] are the necessary ingredients of the ideal of human perfection, as conceived in Dharmasastras and other religious texts A knower of *dharma* (a righteous person) or an ideal man (*sādhu*) is consistently defined in the Epics and Purānas as one who is ever busy in doing good to others through body, mind and speech, who has no complaint against anybody, no ill-will or jealousy towards others, and who sees and treats all beings equally [78]

Unlike the Yoga version of compassion, kindness, as conceived in popular religious texts, is not a mere passive feeling to be nurtured, but a positive virtue to be practised by all in day-to-day life In an interesting narrative, the *Mahābhārata* describes the original character of *asuras*, before it degenerated, as an ideal one [79] These *asuras* of old practised all the ideal moral virtues, such as self-restraint and truthfulness, and were very kind towards the poor, the destitute, the distressed, the orphans, the weak, the old and the unprotected women They actively helped them by giving them food and clothes and were always ready to offer solace and succour to the suffering and the oppressed Of course, the virtue of compassion or kindness is not always presented in this positive manner, but it is an integral part of every Hindu description of a perfect man

Even Śamkara has affirmed that kindness or magnanimity motivates the great souls to work for the good of the ignorant, suffering human beings [80] It is difficult to say what exactly is meant by doing good to others (*paropakāra*) It definitely includes magnanimity and philanthropic works, as digging wells, planting trees etc , though perhaps active physical service is not intended Often it means only instructing or guiding the ignorant human beings, since according to the Hindu point of view, helping a

man to obtain his freedom from transmigratory existence is the best help one can offer to anyone Swami Vivekananda has given a new dimension to the old ideal of compassion by emphasizing the need of providing for the physical needs of the masses before offering them religion [81] though at the same time, he concurs with the Hindu idea of spiritual help as the best help that one can give We think that the motive of compassion is present in Hinduism, only it is to be given the right direction by modern Hindu thinkers

IV The Philosophic Basis for an Altruistic Morality

Though the Vedantic vision of one Self in all could not by itself inspire a morality of love and active service of one's fellow beings, the Aryans were not insensitive to the practical implications of this vision, as is evident from the following passages of the *Bhagavadgītā*

"The Self abiding in all beings and all beings abiding in the Self sees he, whose self has been made steadfast by Yoga and who everywhere sees the same

"He, O Arjuna! who sees with equality everything in the image of his own self, whether in pleasure or in pain, he is considered a perfect yogin "[82]

The phrase, '*ātmopamyena sarvatra samam paśyati*', that is, 'one sees all in the image of oneself', expresses the quintessence of all morality and is the basis of all inter-personal moral virtues This idea is repeated in all the Hindu texts According to Manu, being equal towards all beings or seeing the same Self in all characterizes a knower of *Brahman* [83] *Mahābhārata* repeatedly exhorts man to treat others as oneself This advice of the Epic is based not on any esoteric philosophic vision, but on the commonsense perception of the essential sameness of all living beings

"Don't treat others in a way in which you would not want to be treated by others

"A man who is guilty himself has no right to point to the guilt of others

"How can a man who wants to live himself kill another? Therefore, you should wish for others whatever you want for yourselves

"We should treat others in a way which is desirable for ourselves And we should not act towards others in a way which is undesirable or unplesant for us

"That upright conduct is *dharma* which is determined by kindness "[84]

The gift of fearlessness, as we have seen, is regarded as the greatest gift, and the reason given is that we should always remember that all beings love their life (*prāna*), just as we do Therefore, one is exhorted to understand and treat all beings like oneself *Mahābhārata* does not bother about metaphysical consistency The words life (*prāna*) and self (*ātman*) are used indiscriminately to express the essential similarity of all beings [85] 'Self' or 'life' (*prāna*) here refers to the individual self which is similar, but not identical, in all beings Without going into metaphysical details, the Epic simply asks man to seek the same Self in all, even as he instinctively recognizes the self (*ātman*) in himself [86]

This vision of the essential affinity of all living beings is the most basic vision of Hinduism, and it permeates the entire Hindu 'religio-culture' The *Tirukkurāl* advocates a morality of universal kindness, and justifies its moral ideal on the basis of the basic affinity of all beings

"If a person does not protect other beings from injury, realizing that their pain is his own pain, then what use is his knowledge ?"[87]

A man who perceives the sameness of all selves transcends the dualities and conflicts arising out of the distinction between himself and others According to the *Yoga Vāsistha*, such ideas, as 'this man is a friend and that other is a foe', or, 'this object is mine, and that other is another's', or, 'this self is mine and that one is another', are all false projections of the mind, and must be wiped off from it In fact, such ideas are cherished by the low-minded only, the minds of the noble-hearted men are not clouded by such distinctions According to another reading, the entire world is like a family to the noble-minded [88]

The advice to treat others as one wants to be treated by others is an advice found in other religions also There is one difference though Hinduism has made it more convincing by basing it on the metaphysical vision of one Self in all In an oft-quoted passage, Paul Deussen has said the same thing

"The Gospels quite correctly establish as the highest law of morality, 'Love your neighbour as yourselves' But why should I do so, since by the order of nature I feel pain and pleasure only in myself, not in my neighbour? The answer is not in the Bible But it is in the Vedas, in the great formula, 'That art thou', which gives in three words the combined sum of metaphysics and morals 'you shall love your neighbour as yourselves, because you are your neighbour'"[89]

The Hindu thinkers could not always succeed in deriving a morality of love and kindness to all from their grand vision of the identity of all selves with the one universal Self, but they were always conscious that this vision becomes meaningful only when one habitually sees all in the image of one's self and acts accordingly This vision and its related moral virtues have very well compensated for certain soul-centric tendencies of Hindu moral philosophy Any future reconstruction of a Hindu philosophy of morals must first of all try to develop the Vedantic vision at a philosophical level, and then make it the basis of a positive morality of universal love and compassion

Notes

1 *Brhad Up* I 4 14
2 *M S* IV 155, 161
3 Ibid IV 175
4 *Tirukkural* IV 33
5 *M S* VIII 84-85, 91
6 Ibid IV 172-174
7 Ibid IV 238-243, VIII 17, XII 7-11
8 Ibid IV 155-158, 172-174, 242, XI 232, XII 23, *Mbh Āran P* XXXII 19 ff, 29
9 *The Ethics of the Hindus* (1963), pp 3, 17
10 *Mbh Āran P* CLXXVII 16 ff, CCVI 11-13
11 Ibid, *Śan P* XIV 14 16, XXII 4, XXIII 8-12.
12 Ibid, *Āran P* ch CIC, especially 1-3
13 *B G* II 31-33, XVIII 47-48, cf *M S* X 97
14 *M S* I 91, VIII 413 414, X 100, 123
15 *M S* V 151 ff, IX. 29
16 *Chan Up* IV 4 1-5
17 *Taittiriya Up* I 11 1
18 *Chan Up* III 17 1-4

19 *Brhad Up* V 2 1-3
20 *M S* VI 92
21 Ibid X 63
22 Ibid IV 132
23 Ibid IV 176
24 Ibid V 58
25 *Gaut D S* VIII 22-24
26 *Yajñ S* I 122
27 Ibid III 65-66
28 Quoted in Cromwell Crawford, *Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals* (1974), p 141
29 S K Maitra, op cit (1963), pp 206 ff , Cromwell Crawford, op cit , pp 135 ff
30 *Nyaya Sūtra Bhasya* I 1 2
31 *Yoga Sūtra* II 30-45
32 Ibid I 33
33 *B G* XVI 1-3
34 *Mbh Śan P* CLIV 14 ff , CLVI 8 ff
35 Ibid, *Śan P* CLII 21 ff
36 Ibid, *Śan P* CLII 2 ff , CLVII 1 ff , CLXII 6 ff
37 *Bhag P* , bk I, ch 16, (1973, vol I, p 67)
38 *Tirukkural* III 30, XXV 250, XXVII 261, XXXII 312, 316, XXXIII 322
39 *Mbh San P* CLIV 24, CCLXII 27, *Bhag P* , bk VII, ch 11, (vol I, p 672), bk XI ch 17, (vol II , p 427)
40 *Mbh Śan P* CCLXII 37-38
41 *Bhag P* , bk IV, ch 31, (vol I, p 430), bk VII, ch 6, (vol I, p 640)
42 Ibid, bk III, ch 28, (vol I pp 264 265), bk VII, ch 7, (vol I, p 647), *B G* VI 29-32, XII 13-14
43 *Mbh Śan P* XXI 11, LX 7, *Āran P* II 51-53, *Bhag P* , bk VII, chs 11 and 15, (vol I, pp 672, 688)
44 *Bhag P* , bk VII, ch 14, (vol I, p 684)
45 *Mbh Anus P* CXXIX 16-19, *San P* CCLI 22
46 *Mbh San P* CXIV 64-65
47 W M Urban, *Valuation, Its Nature and Laws* (1909), pp 254, 269-270, 284 ff , 295 ff
48 *Mbh Āran P* , ch CCXCIV , *Udyoga Parva*, ch s CXXXVIII ff
49 Ibid, *Aśvamedha Parva*, chs 92-93
50 *B G* II 55-57, cf ibid IV 19-21
51 Ibid XIV 25
52 *Mbh San P* IX 14 ff , XVII 16 ff
53 *S B* , *Br S* , introd , I 1 4, *S B* , *Brhad Up* II 1 20, *S B* , *Chan Up* II 23 1
54 *B G* V 8-9
55 *Bhag P* , bk V, ch s IX-X, (vol I, pp 460 ff)
56 *M S* VI 8ff, VI 40 ff
57 *B G* III 5, 8, XVIII 11

58 Ibid III 10 ff, 25, V 25, XVIII 41-45
59 Ibid IV 22, cf ibid II 38, 47-50
60 Ibid V 7
61 *Pañcadaśi* VI 269-270, ref to *B G* XIV 23
62 *B G* IX. 22, 26-28, 34, XII 6
63 *Mbh Śan P* CLIV 36, cf XII 13 ff, XVIII 29 ff, XXXVII 28.
64 *M S* IV 138 ff, 171 ff, 238, 246
65 Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (1972), pp 27 ff, 126 ff, 168 ff, 236 ff, *Selections From Swami Vivekananda* (1957), pp 41 ff, *Karma Yoga* (1956), pp 24 ff, 40 ff
66 *M S* VIII 81 ff
67 Ibid IV 179 ff, VI 45 ff, *Mbh Śan P* CLII 21 ff, CLIV 6 ff, CLVI. 8 ff, CCXIII 8 ff
68 *Mbh Anuś P* CXVII 13, 37-38
69 Ibid, *Śan P* CCLV 6, 24 ff, CCLVII 4 ff, CCLX 6 ff
70 Ibid, *Śan P* CLIV 26-28, CCLIV 9 16, 25 ff, *Anuś P* CXVI 20-21, CXVII 25 26
71 Ibid, *Śan P* CCXLIII 5-7, CCLXII 36 ff
72 Ibid, *Anus P* CXVI 12 ff, 20 ff, 59, CXVII 13, 18 ff, 31 ff, *M S* V 51 ff
73 Ibid, *Śan P* CCLIV 43
74 Ibid, *Śan P* CLII 24, CCLI 17, CCLIV 9, *Anuś P* CXVII 18 ff
75 *B G* XII 13-14, cf "He must always promote the good of others and do evil unto none, for the best virtue of a brahmana is universal benevolence" *Visnu Purana*, bk III, ch 8, (1972, p 235)
76 *M S* VI 8
77 Ibid V 46-47
78 *B G* V 25, *Bhag P*, bk XI, ch s 11 and 17, (vol II, pp 409, 427), *Mbh Śan P* CLII 21 ff, CCXXXI 23, CCLIV 9-11, *Āraṇ P* CXCVIII 38 ff
79 *San P* CCXXI 30 ff, especially 39-40
80 *Viveka-cūdamani* 37-38, 82
81 *Lectures From Colombo to Almora* (1956), pp 446 ff
82 *B G* VI 29, 32
83 *M S* XII 118
84 *Mbh Śan P* CCLI 19-21, 24-25
85 Ibid, *Anuś P* CXVI 20-22, CXVII 18 ff
86 Ibid, *Śan P* CCCVIII 126
87 *Tirukkural* XXXII 315
88 *Yoga Vasistha, Upaśama Prakarana*, ch XVIII, (1978, vol II pp 776-777)
89 Quoted in S Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1958), pp 101-102

CHAPTER VII

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

I Recapitulation and Looking Forward

The preceding chapters prove our two basic contentions First, that Hindu religio-philosophy and morality are so integrally related that it is impossible to understand the latter without a proper understanding of the former, and second, that Hindu Dharma, i e the entire Hindu 'religio-culture' is a very complex and multi-faceted one, being constituted of several, rather divergent, religio-philosophical traditions This diversity of metaphysical beliefs and valuational attitudes is strongly reflected in Hindu morality which is as diverse and multi-faceted as the rest of Hindu 'religio-culture' We must, however, dispel here any impression created in the minds of our readers that there is neither any specific world-view or ethos, nor any definite moral code which can be called Hindu as such Though Hinduism has been excessively receptive to new ideas and values, it has also been quite discerning in its choice of ideas to be incorporated in its religio-moral thought It welcomed the transcendentalism and world-and-life-negation of the Samkhyas and Buddhists, the ideal of non-violence of the latter, and the strict monotheism of Islam, because all these ideas found a receptive soil in its own Vedantic philosophy, or appealed to the intuitive perceptions of its people On the other hand, Hinduism has persistently refused to accept various beliefs of the Christian creed, such as predetermination and atonement of all our sins by the sacrifice of Christ, as they go against its own law of karma

(1) It means that there is a definite philosophy or world-view which permeates the entire Hindu 'religio-culture' and which has determined the development of Hinduism through the ages. Admittedly, it is not well-defined and is somewhat in the form of a nebulous vision or faith Ever since the time of Upanisads, a vaguely conceived monism has been the constant background

or framework of entire Hindu Dharma (See chapter I, section V, chapter IV, section II, chapter VI, section IV *supra*.) It signifies that the Divine Absolute is the Creator, as well as the essence, of the entire creation and the Self of all beings. Not only the Upanisads, all popular religious texts, from the *Bhagavadgītā* to the *Manusmrti* and Purānas, affirm the Vedantic monism in their own way. The same vision is also proclaimed by the teachers (acaryas) of theistic Vedanta and innumerable *bhakta* saints. True the masses do not read the Upanisads and the *Bhagavadgītā*, but they all hear Puranas and sing the devotional songs of various *bhakta* saints in their own languages. As a result, the Hindu masses are very much at home with the idea of the Divine Being indwelling all hearts.

The second most important article of the Hindu faith concerns the moral order of the world. The idea of the world being governed by moral laws is very much compatible with the faith in the Divine immanence in the world, but is not derived therefrom. Instead, it is directly traceable to the Vedic concept of *rta*. It is also related to the beliefs in the law of karma and transmigratory existence. As we have observed earlier (vide chapter I, section V, *supra*), the law of karma, being a thoroughly individualistic hypothesis, is contrary to the spirit of Vedantic monism. And yet, the two assertions, regarding the Divine Reality being both the Creator of the world and the inner Self of all living beings and the world being a moral order, understood largely in terms of the law of karma, form the nucleus of the entire creed or religio-philosophy of Hinduism. At the same time, these have never been fully synthesized.

(ii) We would also like to make three observations here. First, Hinduism is an extremely dynamic and ever changing 'religio-culture'. The adaptability of Hinduism to changing times, so far without any conscious guidance from its intellectuals, gives us hope that Hinduism can adapt itself to modern values and the needs of modern times even more easily, if it is given some directive guidance by its philosophers. In order to be able to provide the right direction to the ever-changing Hindu socio-moral norms and attitudes, Hindu thinkers would have to reconstruct the Hindu philosophy of morals, so that it can offer a rationale to Hindus for a meaningful moral life in the present-day society.

Secondly, Hinduism has long accepted the fact that man's *dharma*, comprising all his duties and virtues, changes with the changing times. This contention provides us with a traditional basis for our attempt at the reconstruction of Hindu philosophy of morals, that is, it gives us hope that any worthwhile changes in Hindu moral values and norms, suggested by our philosophers, would be acceptable to the Hindus. And thirdly, due to the very composite nature of the Hindu 'religio-culture', it contains certain inner tensions which must not be brushed aside, but should be frankly recognized. Not only would it help us in a better understanding of Hindu religion and morality, it would also help us in choosing those aspects of Hindu 'religio-culture' which are most in harmony with our modern values, and rejecting others.

II The Flexibility and Adaptability of Hinduism

(1) Hinduism is an extremely dynamic and ever-changing 'religio-culture' which adapts itself very readily to changing times and their needs. (See chapter I, section II and III *supra*.) It has changed sometimes due to its own inner dialectic, at other times due to the impact of new ideas which it absorbed from other sources.

Hinduism has generally been changing due to its own inner dialectic. We have had occasion to discuss the development of Hinduism through the ages. (See chapter I, section III *supra*.) Without repeating our earlier observations, we would just recall here that each phase of Hinduism is best understood in contradistinction to its previous one(s). Thus, while the Upanisadic philosophy was developed as a reaction to the Vedic ritualism, the Dharmasastras were the expressions of the dissatisfaction of the then Aryans with the esoteric and transcendentalist philosophy of Vedanta. The theistic-devotional tradition, in its turn, was a revolt against both the externalistic ritualism of the Vedas and the transcendentalist and esoteric approach of the Vedanta. In Hinduism a new tradition never destroys the old, but definitely and unmistakably modifies it, and is gradually itself modified through long centuries of interaction with the rival traditions. Slowly and steadily Hinduism has been changing due to the constant interaction between its various component traditions.

Hinduism has often changed under the impact of new ideas also We can discern two very major upheavals in the Hindu thought which can be directly traced to foreign sources The first such upheaval was brought about due to the overwhelming influence of Buddhism and Jainism Hinduism borrowed from them the ideal of non-violence (*ahimsā*) and the world-and-life-negation implied in their creed of renunciation Both the ideas or values transformed Hinduism Not only did Hinduism reject the violent Vedic sacrifices, once it accepted the ideal of non-violence, it also changed its entire conception of human perfection and ideal morality to accommodate non-violence and its allied virtues, such as forgiveness, fortitude and equanimity Similarly, the entire Hindu religio-moral thought became profounder and also more pessimistic and negative towards the world and life under the influence of these heterodox philosophies

The second most all-encompassing change was brought about in Hinduism by the impact of modern Western thought The positivist, liberal and humanitarian ideas of Renaissance reached India late, but once they became known, they created an unprecedented upheaval in the Hindu society For the first time in its history, Hindu thinkers became conscious of the gross injustice of the Hindu social organization and its discriminatory practices against the so-called lower classes and the weaker sex They also became acutely conscious of the discrepancy between Hindu ideals and social practices, and set about the Herculean task of questioning and even rejecting those practices which were against both, Hindu ideals and modern values It is due to the missionary zeal and untiring efforts of the thinkers and reformers of the Hindu renaissance that most of the extreme evils of the Hindu society, such as ill-treatment and even burning of the widows and the practice of untouchability, have either been eradicated, or are at least fast on the decline (See chapter I, section III *supra*)

Conditions have changed tremendously in the last few decades, especially in the urban Hindu society Though caste distinctions are still widely practised, because they serve the vested socio-economic interests of certain caste groups, they have lost all their religious (ritualistic) relevance, due to the conditions created by industrialization and urbanization of the Indian

society Revolutionary changes have been brought about in the conditions and social rights of women The Hindu Code Bill, passed in the early fifties, gives equal rights to women in every respect They are given the right to divorce, remarry and inherit ancestral property And more and more women are availing of the rights given to them under modern laws

(ii) We can appreciate the liberality of modern Hindu legislation only if we compare it with (i) the highly conservative and reactionary stance of ancient legislators, and (ii) the refusal of other religious communities to accept such reforms Take the women's right to divorce and remarry for instance Most ancient Law-givers, especially Manu, are strongly against it Manu has declared categorically that the second husband of a woman is never heard of [1] All Hindu texts give excessive importance to a wife's ideal of extreme loyalty to her husband (*pativrata dharma*) which excludes any possibility of divorce or remarriage for Hindu women In fact, they are just unthinkable in the traditional context Similarly, most Hindus, the literate and the illiterate alike, are opting for planned families And they do so in direct defiance of their sacred tradition Procreation has been regarded as most sacred in Hindu religion The Upanisads, in spite of their transcendantalist philosophy, glorify the act of procreation as a sacrifice [2] Procreation or proliferation of the race was so important for the Aryans that it was stipulated that a girl should be married early, so as not to waste a single productive year of her life [3] Furthermore, a son is very important in Hindu religion A man is supposed to be born with various debts, including the one to his parents He can repay his debt to his parents by procreating and continuing the family line Above all, as we know (*vide* chapter II, section I *supra*), the funeral rites performed by son(s) are a must for ensuring the eschatological destiny of the deceased,[4] in the absence of which a man's soul is said to become a ghost (*preta*) And it is just not a casual belief, Hindus actually take their funeral rites very seriously The acceptance of the principle of planned family by the Hindus implies a rejection of this very vital article of Hindu faith, and expresses the extreme adaptability of Hindu Dharma To give one more example, Hindu women have entered every field of public life, from medicine to police and administration. Hindu society has accepted the public role

of women, even though Manu and others have repeatedly affirmed that there should be no independence for women at any stage of their lives [5]

We can appreciate the adaptability of the Hindu society even more when we compare the ease with which the Hindu society has allowed itself to be transformed by the forces of modernisation with the resistance offered to new liberal ideas by the Christian Church during the Renaissance For example, Hindus have accepted all modern scientific theories, without ever feeling that their religion is threatened by them, while each new scientific doctrine was opposed vehemently by the Catholic Church in the West The latter is still not ready to give its formal sanction to family planning and divorce Till recently the Church in Kerala refused the right to inherit the family property to women Both Muslims and Catholic Christians have persistently refused to adopt the idea of planned families on the plea that procreation or proliferation is commanded in their respective religious texts, and curtailing the size of the family goes against that command But, as we have seen, a son is far more important for a Hindu than for a member of any other religious community And yet, the Hindus are adopting family planning on a large scale, while other Indian religious groups are still reluctant to do so Similarly, the Muslim society has persistently refused to accept any reforms in its personal law While polygamy is strictly prohibited under the modern Hindu law, it is both practised and defended by modern Muslims in the name of religion The immense opposition to the liberal court judgment in the Shah Bano case (granting a pittance to her by way of alimony) from all sections of the Muslim society expresses the unwillingness of the latter to adapt itself to the changing times

(ii) It is usually argued here that Hinduism does not have either a central Church or a definite Book (religious text) Therefore, Hindus can adapt themselves to changing times, whereas the followers of prophetic religions are bound to obey their respective Churches and Books or creeds True, Hinduism does not have a single religious text, but the Dharmasastras, especially the *Manusmrti*, are unanimously regarded as authoritative in matters of *dharma* (socio-moral duties) The Law-givers and the Hindu society in general have always expected

strict adherence to the norms of conduct, as enunciated in the Dharmaśāstras and the traditions or customs of the society Till recently one had to face social ostracism if one failed to adhere to all the taboos and customs of the society And yet, despite the powerful religio-social sanction for old values and norms of conduct, the Hindu society has managed to welcome and assimilate new ways and values, some of which are quite contradictory to the traditional ones The fact that new ways, laws and values have not invited any strong opposition from the more conservative elements of the Hindu society certainly proves the immense catholicity and adaptability of Hinduism

III The Concept of the Relativity of Dharma and the Possibility of Change

(1) Hinduism's immense adaptability stems from its faith in the relativity of man's *dharma* (duty) to place (*deśa*), time (*yuga*) and other relevant factors[6] (See chapter III section I *supra*) The *Mahābhārata* presents a strong case for the relativity of morals to place, time and the circumstances It argues against accepting either Vedas or Smrtis as unconditional authority for determining one's *dharma* (duty) It observes that Vedas or their injunctions and prohibitions have a rather limited scope and they cannot possibly cover all the eventualities of life It then rightly points out that with the changing times, circumstances in peoples' lives also change, so that whatever was morally right in the earlier times may not be so in modern times It goes so far as to say that there is no conduct or custom which is conducive to the good of all equally[7] Therefore, one's duty or *dharma* must be decided not on the basis of religious injunctions only, but on pragmatic considerations, after taking into account all the relevant factors of a given situation

The *Smrtikāras* (Law-givers) discuss the sources of *dharma* and cite the Vedas, Smrtis and the conduct of righteous persons as the chief sources or criteria for determining men's duties, both religious and socio-moral Manu asserts in the very beginning of his work that it deals with the sacred laws of Vedas and Smrtis, as well as the norms of conduct (*ācāra*) followed by the four classes (*varnas*) What is more, Manu seems to equate the

three as the sources or authorities for determining the right mode of conduct[8] Out of the three most important sources or criteria of *dharma* (duty), the Vedas are theoretically the supreme authority, then come the Smrtis, and last of all the conduct of good people But generally all the three are cited together as the sources or criteria of *dharma*

Manu even seems to think that the conduct of the wise and good men of the society is the most important criterion for determining a man's duty or right course of conduct in life Manu asserts quite early in his work

"Learn that sacred law which is followed by men learned (in Vedas) and assented to in their hearts by the virtuous, who are ever exempt from hatred and inordinate affection"[9]

He repeats the same advice later on

"Let him, untired, follow the conduct of the virtuous men, connected with his occupation, which has been declared in Vedas and Smrtis and is the root of *dharma* (or is rooted in *dharma*)" And,

"Let him walk on that path of holy men which his fathers and grandfathers followed While he walks on that he suffers no harm"[10]

The conduct of the wise men of society (*sadācāra*) is agreed to be a very important criterion to determine one's *dharma* (duty) According to Āpastamba

"That is *dharma* (duty and virtue) the practice of which is praised by the wise men of the three upper classes, what they blame is sin

"He shall regulate his course of action according to the conduct which in all countries is unanimously approved by men of the three twice-born classes, who are obedient, aged, of subdued senses, neither given to avarice, nor hypocrites"[11]

Harīta explains the term *sadācāra* as derived from the root *sat*, and understands *sat* as meaning good Good men (*sādhu*) are those who are devoid of any evil (moral defect), and the conduct of such good men is called *sadācāra*[12] Thus, though theoretically the authority of Vedas and Smṛtis was supreme, the conduct and agreed opinions of the learned and righteous men of the society were given more importance in practical matters Viśvarūpa even says that the Smṛtis should be followed

only in those cases wherein they are in accordance with the agreed mode of ideal conduct of the good people (*śista*) of the Aryan society [13] Medhātithi goes a step further and says that since Dharmasastra is that which gives the knowledge of *dharma*, the conduct of the righteous persons (*śistācāra*) is also a kind of Dharmasāstra or Smṛti [14] Medhātithi further says that practices or norms of conduct which are approved by Smrtis, but which are criticized by the good people of the community, or offend the moral sense of the people, such as the practice of *niyoga*, should not be regarded as authoritative [15]

Theoretically, the standard or criterion of man's socio-moral conduct consists of the conduct followed by the morally upright persons (*sadācāra*) But mostly the prefix *sat* (good or right) was dropped, so that a man was simply advised to follow the customs (*ācāra*) of his community Generally, the ancient Law-givers did not make any distinction between the two criteria, the conduct of good men (*sadācāra*) and custom (*ācāra*), probably because the latter was expected to be based on the former Sometimes the relation was even reversed, and the conduct of good men was explained in terms of the customs of a given community [16]

Āpastamba starts his work by distinguishing between two *dharmas* (duties), the ritualistic duties for which Vedas are the sole authority, and the social duties which have to be determined on the basis of the agreement (*samaya*) of learned men [17] This agreement is expressed in the customs of a given country at a given time

What are these customs which are to serve as the criterion for men's socio-moral conduct? Generally any usages or practices that are in vogue in a particular community and are old, that is, are handed down to the people by their forefathers, are accepted as standard for determining men's duties [18] These customs are relative to various factors, such as place (*deśa*), time (*yuga*) and community All Hindu Law-books point out that customs differ from one society or community to another The difference in the conduct and customs of the peoples of the North and the South are often cited as an example of the relativity of customs to place (*deśa*) [19]

Generally, it is agreed among the Law-givers that whereas the Vedic injunctions regarding various Vedic rituals are

universally authoritative, in other matters people should be left free to follow their respective customs It is frankly recognized that Vedas cannot possibly cover all real life situations Therefore, the injunctions of Vedas and the laws of Smṛtis should be supplemented by local customs These customs should have authority in the absence of Vedic instructions in a particular case A king is constantly advised to take into consideration the various customs of his people, while deciding legal matters The customs which should be followed by the people and the king alike include those of the countries, classes (*varnas*) and communities (*jātis*), as well as families (*kulas*) [20] The Law-books instruct a king that he should respect the customs (*ācāra* or *paramparā*) of the vanquished people and must not impose those of his people on them [21] Yajñavalkya even says that the varying usages or conventions of guilds, traders and various associations or professional groups should be respected by a king in the same manner, as he respects the usages of brahmanas [22]

Two stipulations are added to this general rule First, the *dharma* (here custom) of countries, castes or families has authority only if it is not opposed to the Vedas [23] Secondly, such customs should be followed only by the people of that community in which they are in vogue, but if they are followed by people of other communities, then their practice becomes sinful [24]

These customs or ideal modes of conduct are not only relative to place, but also to time Hindu thinkers were very much aware of the power of time and the changes it brings in men and society, especially in the values and ways of a given people Manu has specifically stated that the ideal conduct of men changes in the four legendary ages (*yugas*) of *Satya*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali* [25] It is asserted by the Law-givers that a conduct which may be alright for the people of early ages, such as *niyoga*, cannot be permitted in the present *Kali* age (This perception led to innumerable ritualistic and often amoral prohibitions or taboos, called *kali-varjya*) [26]

In addition to the customs and ideal modes of conduct of good people which are expected to change according to place (*desa*) and time (*yuga*), reason is also accepted as a criterion for determining the right course of action A king is not only advised to respect the different customs of his subjects, he is also advised to

use his discrimination or reason in deciding legal disputes, since an exclusive reliance on religious texts can defeat its own purpose and harm the interests of *dharma* (justice)[27] Significantly, Manu has added the satisfaction of one's heart (conscience) among the sources or criteria of *dharma* He even asserts that in case of a conflict between the views of these different authorities, a man should take recourse to his reason to decide his course of conduct[28] He adds that the pronouncements of good brāhmans (*śiṣṭas*) should be accepted as authoritative in cases in which no definite rule from religious texts is available for guidance[29] Of course, Manu was not able to consistently maintain his liberal position. But such passages do suggest that reason or conscience was acceptable to ancient thinkers as an authority in judging moral matters

(ii) The above discussion must have proved that Hindu socio-moral thought acknowledges both the possibility and even the advisability of change in the mores (customs) of a society. The customs or concepts of the ideal mode of conduct and the values of a particular society change with changing times And such changes can be easily accepted by the Hindu society, since some sort of sanction to that effect already exists in Hindu thought Alternatively, when the elders or leaders of a community (*mahājana*) agree that the customs prevailing in their community should change, then the king (or the society) should recognize the changed customs and values We have seen that Manu and other Law-givers have accepted the right of the elders or learned men of good conduct (*śista*) to provide guidance to the society through new norms of conduct in two kinds of situations first, in which no specific guidance is available in the ancient sacred laws, and second, in which the changed times and circumstances make it necessary that old norms should be rejected or modified, as in the case of the ancient sanction for the practice of *niyoga* The present-day life is full of both kinds of situations in which old rules are either inapplicable or offend the moral sense of the modern man All these situations require the modification or rejection of old norms of conduct and formulation of new ones Hinduism seems to demand only that the new norms should come from men who are *śistas*, that is, are both learned and morally upright persons Then only can we be sure that the

new norms and values are worthy ones from a religio moral point of view

For Manu *et al* their age (about two millenniums ago) was the age of degeneration (*Kali-yuga*) which demanded stricter restrictions on man's socio-moral conduct and rejection of many of old practices We in the present age may think the same, that is, may find our times as a period of moral crisis and may feel that the rules and regulations, put down by Manu and other Law-givers about two thousand years ago, are to be rejected (*varjya*) in our present age And if we decide to do so, we would be strictly in accordance with the spirit, if not the letter, of Dharmasastras

It may be that Manu and other Law-givers, who were highly conservative men from our standards, would not have approved the changes in old customs and values that a modern Hindu philosopher may propose But their ancestors would have, in their turn, disapproved the drastic changes brought about by them in old values and customs For example, we know that the ancient Hindus effected a revolutionary change in the Vedic rituals when they substituted the bloody Vedic sacrifices by new vegetarian sacrifices in which butter and grains were poured into fire [30] Seeing that the Vedic *yajñas* enjoyed the highest prestige in the ancient society, and were clearly defined and determined by the Brāhmanas (texts), the substitution of the sacrifice of animals by simple oblations into fire in the Epic period was as revolutionary a change in Hindu Dharma, as has ever been attempted by any people in the world If such a fundamental change in the very core of Hindu religion was accepted both by Hindu thinkers and priests, there is no reason to doubt that any changes suggested by modern Hindu thinkers would be unacceptable to the Hindu society, provided of course, they have intrinsic worth

As we have seen in our previous section, Hindu society has accepted far-reaching social reforms through secular legislation A major part of this civil legislation (Hindu Code Bill and the Bill against untouchability) goes against the grain of ancient Hindu laws and values Their acceptance by the Hindu society expresses the basic Hindu perception that the socio-moral norms change with the times To a Western observer the acceptance

of civic reforms by the Hindu society may not seem extraordinary, since socio-moral matters are quite separate from religious concerns, and at least theoretically independent of religious authority, in Western thought The tradition of distinguishing religious concerns from secular ones goes as far back as Christ himself[31] But things are entirely different for Hindu Dharma. (See chapter I, section I and VI *supra.*) As we know, there is no separate word for religion in the Sanskrit language Religion in the Western sense is called *mārga* (way) or *sampradāya* (sect) It is vaguely distinguished from, but integrally related to, the more comprehensive concept of *dharma* And *dharma* comprehends or has authority over the entire life of a man Dharmasastras are mainly concerned with regulating the life and conduct of men, but they also have supreme religious authority It means that the acceptance of liberal reforms by the Hindu society is not due to the fact that secular concerns are independent of religious authority in the Hindu 'religio-culture', but is rather due to the inherent catholicity of Hinduism that makes allowance for necessary changes in socio-moral norms and customs with the change in times and circumstances

IV Some Inner Tensions in the Hindu Thought

There is no doubt that Hindu Dharma is a very complex and unsystematic whole which comprehends and unifies, even though in a very general way, several religio-philosophical and valuational approaches (See chapter I, section I *supra*) There was a continuous interaction between these different religio-philosophical traditions Hinduism is a product of that interaction and contains ideas and values which originated in quite different cultural milieus, and hence are not always mutually compatible At the same time, though some of the inconsistencies of Hinduism can be traced to divergent religio-philosophical traditions, many have their origin in one and the same Vedic tradition Thus, the Vedantic philosophy, though a creation of the Vedic Aryans, goes against several very important contentions of its parent tradition

(1) The Vedantic vision of one 'Divine' indwelling all living beings is contrary to the insistence on innate differences between,

and basic inequality of, all men in the Vedic-Dharmasâstric tradition At the philosophical level, the assumption of the inequality of men is sought to be justified on the basis of the law of karma which traces these inequalities of the present life to the actions of different selves in their past lives (See chapter III, section II *supra*) There is nothing wrong in the recognition of differences between man and man, but the assertion of basic inequality of all men is another matter This assertion seems natural in the context of such ancient civilizations, as the Greek and the Roman, which frankly advocated the essential inequality of all men and practised slavery But it is very incongruous in the Indian context, because it totally contradicts the Vedantic vision of the Divine Self indwelling all beings The stratification of the society into innumerable castes and sub-castes is very much in harmony with the Vedic-Dharmasastric ethos, but entirely inconsistent with the Vedāntic vision The tension between the two sets of beliefs is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that both of them belong to the Vedic tradition

As we have seen (vide chapter IV, section VIII *supra*), Śamkara has declared the universal Self to be beyond all caste distinctions and other empirical qualifications He has further asserted that since all individual selves are identical with the supreme Self, there is no metaphysical basis for distinguishing one self from another [32] And yet, the same Śamkara not only denies the right to practise the Vedic Dharma to sūdras, he also recommends cruelest punishment to that unfortunate man who dares to overstep his limitations [33] Śamkara's views are the best example of the self-inconsistency of the Hindu approach

(ii) Even though the Vedanta originated in Vedas, both its metaphysics and moral approach are essentially different from the Vedic-Dharmasāstric tradition Above all, the Vedāntic approach is at variance with the Vedic polytheism and ritualism All Vedantic schools, whether belonging to the tradition of liberation or devotion, affirm the immanence of the 'Divine' in all hearts, as well as the importance of the inner spirit, as against the outer acts, in both religion and morality The Vedic Polytheism and ritualism are entirely contrary to the above approach. It is the properly performed ritual that brings the reward, and both righteousness (*dharma*) and evil or sin (*adharma*) mainly

refer to external ritualistic acts Moral qualifications or the purity of the heart are not much relevant in one's religion which largely consists in the performance of various rituals Now, Hindus have accepted both the traditions They believe in the Divine Self indwelling all beings, and then go and worship innumerable gods in temples and under trees! They also believe in the worth of the inner spirit, and then very carefully perform various rituals, or take baths in the holy rivers to wash off their sins, without ever bothering about the essential contradiction between the two beliefs

(iii) At least one important inconsistency of Hinduism can be explained on the basis of the fact that Hinduism has absorbed the ethoses of two opposing religio-philosophical traditions, without seeking to synthesize them The reference here, of course, is to the polytheistic, ritualistic, world-and-life-affirming and relatively more socio-centric Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition and the transcendentalist, world-and-life-negating and liberation-centric tradition of the schools of philosophy As a result, almost every aspect of Hindu Dharma (its religion, philosophy and morality) is bi-polar, that is, consists of two almost divergent view-points and valuational approaches (See chapter I, sections II and III *supra*) That is why we find that on the one hand, Hindus desire and cherish worldly goods and prosperity, on the other, they constantly talk of the transience of all worldly objects and futility of all mundane pursuits On the one hand, they affirm and actually try to fulfil their socio-moral responsibilities, especially towards their families, on the other, they venerate the renunciant most who has abandoned all his worldly ties and socio-moral responsibilities Similarly, the virtues of magnanimity and manliness, cherished in the first tradition, are in sharp contrast to the more saintly virtues like self-control and equanimity of the second tradition And Hindus cherish both sets of virtues

(iv) Another related tension within Hinduism is between its socio-centric and self-centric tendencies We have assumed that the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition is socio-centric, while the tradition of liberation is self-centric To a certain extent this assumption is true The law of karma is one single factor, most responsible for the self-centric tendency of the Hindu ethos

(See chapter I, section V and chapter IV, section III *supra*) The theory of karma and transmigratory existence engenders extreme individualism In all probability, the theory was initially developed in heterodox circles At the same time, the tension between the socio-centric and self-centric tendencies within Hinduism goes much deeper than the simple polarity suggested by us Though the Dharmasastric morality is definitely socio-centric, the polytheism and ritualism of this tradition, especially of Vedas and popular Hinduism, is quite self-centric V M Apte has pointed out that all Vedic sacrifices were performed at the individual level, and there were no temples or public places of worship in the Vedic times [34] Popular Hindu religion is positively self-centric in the simple sense that most persons following popular religion are solely motivated by the selfish desire for personal gain Now, this self-centric tendency of Vedic and popular ploytheism goes against the definite socio-centric stance of the Dharmasastras A certain tension between the two valuational approaches is present throughout Hinduism

(v) The law of karma is very basic to the entire Hindu religio moral thought It is also responsible for two inner contradictions of Hindu thought and practice First, the hypothesis of karma and transmigratory existence presupposes plurality and isolated existence of individual souls who are entirely unrelated to one another This view goes directly against the Vedantic monism which is very basic to the Hindu faith The latter categorically affirms the Divine Absolute (*Ātman-Brahman*) to be the Self of all beings, and implicity denies the separate or independent existence of individual souls

The law of karma which emphasizes the aloneness of individual souls also goes against the spirit of the Vedic tradition which believes in the solidarity of all men Above all, a very special bond is supposed to exist between parents and progeny in the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition Manu expresses this idea by saying that a father is born again in the son [35] The funeral rites (*śrāddha*), as we know (vide chapter II, section I *supra*), are an essential part of the Vedic-Dharmasastric religion, and presuppose this solidarity or continuity between parents and progeny The entire group of funeral rites, even though it is a later innovation, is harmoniously related to the Vedic ethos The

Vedic ritualistic tradition emphasizes the correct performance of the external act more than the inner spirit, and believes that the fruits of rituals performed by the priests can be reaped by the host (*yajamāna*) Similarly, the belief in and the practice of funeral rites means that the rites performed by a man's son(s) can help him in the other world and secure a long stay in heaven for him

On the other hand, the theory of karma judges the moral worth of an action on the basis of inner spirit or motive It also emphasizes the moral accountability of the individual for all his actions (*karmas*) and asserts that a man cannot escape the results of his actions No amount of rituals can alter his lot which is determined by the moral quality of his own actions The law of karma is an extremely individualistic hypothesis which asserts that no man can ever help another and that every man has to work out his destiny alone [36] This belief thus completely denies the possibility of the ancestors benefiting from the funeral rites performed by their son(s) Moreover, while the practice of funeral rites presupposes that the ancestors keep on waiting in the other world to be benefited by the rites performed by their son(s) and grandson(s),[37] the theory of karma and transmigratory existence asserts that the soul immediately relates itself to another body here on earth itself [38] The ontology and moral approach of the law of karma are so diametrically opposed to those implied in the practice of funeral rites,[39] that it is a wonder that Hindus have been able to cling to both beliefs-cum-practices for so long

(vi) There is a definite ambivalence in the Hindu thinkers' attitude towards women (See chapter III, section V *supra*) We find passages condemning and adulating women in all Hindu religious texts Sometimes completely opposite views are given in one and the same text Take the *Manusmrti* for example It contains the famous passages declaring the mother to be the supreme object of reverence and hailing the positive role of women in ensuring the welfare of the family [40] Manu is also the author of those infamous passages which denounce women as lustful and degenerate creatures [41] There are even more glaring inconsistencies While Manu admits the practice of *niyoga* in some passages,[42] he declares such a practice as unthinkable, immoral and highly objectionable in others [43] Manu has affirmed at one place that

the murder of a woman is as grave an offence as that of a *brāhmana* or a child[44] But on another occasion he has included the murder of an (adulterous) woman of any class under minor sins[45] Now, it is reasonable to suppose that some of these views might be interpolations But the fact that none of the learned commentators of the *Manusmrti* during the middle ages noted these contradictions is significant The attempt to explain the inconsistencies in the Hindu approach towards women by assigning the conflicting views to different writers or different times would not help us, as all the conflicting views are found in each of the numerous religious texts! For example, the *Yājñavalkya Smrti* contains all the usual cliches about the purity of women, the immense respectability of mother, as well as the advice to guard all women, since they are lustful, frivolous creatures![46]

V Some Suggestions For A Reconstruction of the Hindu Philosophy of Morals

We have observed above i that Hinduism is an immensely dynamic and adaptable 'religio-culture', ii that it has a strong tradition which sanctions changes in the socio-moral norms in accordance with the needs of changed times or circumstances, and iii that it contains several pairs of beliefs and practices which are mutually inconsistent The first two observations give us hope that any desirable changes in the ancient values and norms, suggested by modern Hindu thinkers, would not be rejected by the Hindu society They also put a great responsibility upon our philosophers who can, if they so choose, give a right direction to the ever-changing Hindu Dharma The last, i e the presence of several inconsistencies within Hindu thought, suggests the possibility and scope for a reconstruction of the Hindu philosophy of morals

In order to attempt a critical reconstruction of Hindu thought, the modern philosopher would have to reaffirm or emphasize those perceptions or values of Hinduism which are more in harmony with our modern values and sensibilities, and oppose or reject others which are incompatible with our modern ones There need not be any misgiving that such a reconstruction would result in a total transformation or loss of identity of Hindu

Dharma Hinduism does not give a *carte blanche* for change in its philosophy or morality It has a vision or philosophy which must form the nucleus of any future reconstruction of Hindu philosophy of morals

The proposed reconstruction of the Hindu philosophy of morals would consist of several related steps or tasks It would include a reassertion of certain basic Hindu beliefs and values, a rejection of those beliefs, values and practices which go against these basic beliefs, an attempt at synthesizing those beliefs and values which are found to be worth-while, but mutually inconsistent, and development of some other ideas which have been only vaguely suggested in Hindu thought, but can be useful for a philosophy of morals A philosopher attempting to reconstruct such a philosophy may either start by first selecting and rationally presenting those basic ideas of Hinduism which have intrinsic worth, or he may take up various beliefs and values of Hinduism and notice the inconsistencies or tensions between them, compare and contrast them, and then select those ideas which have intrinsic value and are basic to the Hindu ethos We have opted for the second kind of approach, while suggesting below some tasks for our philosopher

(1) The first step towards a reconstruction of the Hindu philosophy of morals would be to challenge the organization of the society on the basis of hereditary castes and the practice of untouchability Both have so far enjoyed strong religious sanction, but are at the same time contrary to the basic Vedantic vision of one universal Self in all beings Any modern philosopher can legitimately question the practice of untouchability and caste discriminations by reasserting the basic Vedantic faith and pointing out the glaring contradiction involved in the Hindu faith and practice Not only the Upanisads, all other religious texts have unanimously and emphatically affirmed the metaphysical unity of all living beings (See chapter VI, section IV *supra*) The *Bhagavadgītā* proclaims that the real yogin or devotee is the one who sees one Self or the Lord in all living beings and looks upon all in the image of oneself [47] The *Mahābhārata* repeatedly points out that the self or life (*prāna*) is the same in all living beings [48] All the *bhakta* saints insist on the 'Divine' indwelling all beings, which makes all beings equally divine or sacred [49]

Moreover, all Hindu philosophic systems believe in the duality of self and body, and assert the transcendent nature of the self If so, class distinctions cannot pertain to the inner self, as they are supposed to pertain to the body But they cannot belong to the body either The thinkers of the tradition of liberation have given very vivid descriptions of the loathsome constituents of the body, such as blood, bone, urine etc It is also agreed that the bodies of all living beings consist of the same five basic elements (*pañcatattva*), and nowhere is there any suggestion for any basic biological difference between man and man Kabīr concludes that all men are born same and the differences between them are man-made and artificial [50]

There is no philosophic justification in Hinduism for discrimination against large sections of the society Mostly the law of karma is implicitly accepted as providing a pseudo-justification for such unjust practices The law of karma is very basic to Hindu thought, and cannot be rejected, or even questioned in its totality The future philosopher of Hinduism, therefore, would have to seek to understand and present this belief in its original moral context, as implying first, the moral responsibility of the individual, and second, the moral order of the world which ensures that every evil is punished and every suffering is compensated in the end It was only gradually that the law of karma became an ally of the practice of class discriminations The two should be delinked now, so that no semblance of justification remains for the above social evils

(ii) The second task of our moral philosopher would be to challenge the strong alliance between polytheism and ritualism at the popular level Both go back to the Vedas and are the major ingredients, or rather constitute the whole, of popular Hinduism So we can hardly hope that the writings of a few philosophers would break their hold over the masses Yet we think that the two beliefs-cum-practices have very unhealthy ramifications for morality, and every effort should be made to emancipate Hinduism from their overwhelming influence First, both polytheism and ritualism, implying the faith in the self-efficacy of rituals, are highly irrational and dogmatic, and definitely undermine a rational approach to life and morality We feel that genuine morality can exist only at the rational level, and

hence both polytheism and ritualism are detrimental to morality. Secondly, both beliefs are equally detrimental to human effort (*purusārtha*) Faith in the availability of gods' help and the efficacy of rituals kills all incentive for effort for achieving one's goals, sometimes with disastrous effects (To give just one example, children used to die for want of medical care in cases of the disease of pox which is even now supposed to be the result of the wrath of some goddess) Thirdly, since the one term *dharma* means both ritualistic and moral duties in Hinduism, the prevalence of a very strong ritualistic tradition has confused the moral perspective of Hindus It has also resulted in a tendency to be satisfied with the performance of some ritualistic acts as a substitute for genuine socio-moral duties (such as throwing some food on the ground to feed all living beings in the daily sacrifice of *Balivaiśvadeva*) Such ritualistic substitutes permanently undermine genuine moral consciousness of one's responsibilities towards one's fellow beings Fourthly, both, belief in various gods and the practice of various rituals, are undertaken in a spirit of business transaction, i e with an express motive to get some specific personal desire fulfilled thereby Since there is no marked difference between ritualistic and moral duties in Hinduism, the attitude associated with ritualism is usually transferred to socio-moral matters, thus undermining the very basis of morality Fifthly, and possibly most importantly, both polytheism and ritualistic practices directly undermine a moral approach to life and religion, in that no moral qualification is required for the worship of gods or the practice of rituals A man can expect to receive a boon from a god if he carries out a ritual or a ritualistic vow (*vrata*) in the specified manner, and this is ensured irrespective of whether the man deserves the boon or not (See chapter II, section I and IV *supra*) Therefore every effort must be made to emancipate the Hindu society from the overwhelming and amoral influence of polytheism and ritualism

A Hindu thinker can seriously challenge Hindu polytheism by a reassertion of the Vedantic theism, as enunciated in the devotional sects The theism of the devotional sects is rooted in the Vedantic monism, and is highly respected among the Hindu masses True religion, for the *Bhakti* sects, consists in one-pointed devotion to the supreme God This devotion is at the

same time integrally related to the practice of highest moral virtues Vedantic theism, thus, both contradicts and undermines Hindu polytheism and provides a very convincing justification for a profound morality We are here not oblivious of the possible negative socio-moral ramifications of common theism, such as intolerance, fanaticism and fundamentalism But Vedāntic theism does not generally lend itself to fanatical tendencies

(iii) There are certain beliefs and valuational attitudes in Hinduism, none of which can be rejected, even though they seem to be mutually contradictory, since both of them have intrinsic worth Thus, the third task of our ethical philosopher would be not to choose out of, but to reconcile, the world-and-life-affirmation of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition with the devaluation of the world and life in the tradtion of liberation At first glance it would appear that we must altogether reject the perceptions and values of the tradition of liberation, as they seem to go against both, the interests of social morality and modern perceptions or ways And by the same argument we must adopt the philosophy and values of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition which are much more in consonance with modern values and ways But such a choice would not only be false to the synthetic Hindu ethos, it would also be harmful to the interests of morality A certain amount of world-and-life-negation gives depth and profundity to the world-view and approach of a society This is especially needed in the modern times as a corrective to the extreme materialism of the West Large sections of the Hindu society have unconditionally accepted Western materialism and whatever else goes with it, e g selfish, individualistic pursuit of one's interests, violence and rejection of one's socio-moral obligations and all traditional Hindu values This has given rise to a strange hybrid culture in Indian cities which misses the good points of both ethoses, Indian and Western Hence there is the need to develop a more rational and milder version of Hindu world-and-life-negation and synthesize it with the positive or affirmative ethos of its original Vedic tradition

(iv) A similar synthetic approach must be adopted towards the socio-centric and the self-centric tendencies within Hinduism The choice here seems to be even more obvious in favour of the socio-centric stance of the Vedic-Dharmasastric tradition, as

against the apparent self-centric tendencies of the tradition of liberation But again, this would be a wrong choice for two reasons first, because the Vedic-Dharmaśastric polytheism and ritualism also have a strong self-centric tendency, and secondly, because they emphasize the external act more than the inner spirit, and hence cannot provide us with a worthy moral code On the other hand, the tradition of liberation advocates a profounder moral approach It emphasizes the value of purity of heart and such virtues as self-control, fortitude, forgiveness and non-violence These virtues form a very important part of any comprehensive moral ideal, and are even more important in the present-day Hindu society which seems to have forgotten even the meaning of self-control and non-violence Now, we cannot accept the virtues advocated in the tradition of liberation without imbibing a certain amount of world-and-life-negation of this tradition

A modern Hindu ethical philosophy would definitely include the world-and-life-affirmation of, and the emphasis on the discharge of one's socio-moral obligations in, the Dharmasastric tradition It would, at the same time, seek to reconcile the above with the perceptions and values of the second tradition A certain synthesis of the two valuational approaches is already achieved in the *Bhagavadgītā's* ideal of desireless performance of one's duties and the Dharmasastric concept of an ideal householder who performs all his socio-moral duties with immense self-control and equanimity [51]

The task before our philosopher, therefore, is not the simple one of choosing one of the two ethoses, but of synthesizing them While reformulating a Hindu philosophy of morals, our philosopher would be required to emphasize those values and moral perceptions which are in accordance with the more liberal values of modern times, and reject the others At the same time, he would have to judge the modern Western values in the context of the basic Hindu philosophy and valuational approach This would require him to affirm some of those values which may not be fully in tune with the modern Western ones, but which are basic to the Hindu vision and approach, such as contentment, detachment and equanimity These virtues or values would

understandably be presented in a milder form in our modern synthetic Hindu philosophy of morals

(v) Another task of our philosopher of Hindu morality would be to develop or clearly formulate certain vaguely presented ideas of Hindu social thought The Dharmasastras contain some valuable ideas in seed form which should be properly developed in the context of modern conditions First such idea is the ancient concept of man's owing debts to various sections of the society which can be repaid only by discharging various socio-moral obligations towards others The concept is an extremely valuable one and should be emphasized in modern times, when the individual's rights have become the basis of all socio-moral thought and practice

Another such morally relevant idea is the accountability of the individual for his moral conduct to the society We know that this concept has often been misused to exploit the poor masses in the Hindu society Admittedly, there is always the possibility of its misuse in the hands of powerful, but unscrupulous, men in any society Still, the idea in itself is a worthy one and must be developed with proper safeguards This idea of the individual's answerability to the society for his moral conduct goes directly against the modern principle of individual's life and conduct being his own personal concern We do not agree with this latter view, that is, we believe that the individual's life and conduct necessarily affect the happiness or otherwise of other persons around him To give an example, marriage and divorce are regarded in modern thought as the exclusive concern of the individual partners But they do influence the happiness and the life or lot of other members of the family, especially the children And they indirectly influence the entire society through those persons who are thus affected A casual glance at the insecurity, unrest and frustration felt by the members of broken homes would prove the wisdom of Hindu perceptions None of the ancient ideas need be accepted as such Rather, they have to be carefully modified in accordance with the modern emphasis on the individual's right to lead one's own life As we see it, a reasonable synthesis of the above two points of view, the Hindu and the modern Western, is both possible and desirable

Though the Dharmasastric idea of man's indebtedness

towards other members of the society is an invaluable asset for any philosophy of morals, the Hindu concept of society is very vague and narrow, and must be suitably modified It mostly refers to the limited community in the immediate neighbourhood of the individual, largely organized on the basis of caste, community or region, which has resulted in the division of society into innumerable segmented groups This suggests the failure of Hindu thinkers in developing a wider and morally more relevant concept of society We must reject all these limiting divisions and affirm the concept of nation-society The individual's loyalties and responsibilities should no more be limited to his immediate community, but must be directed to the society as a whole The very survival of the highly segmented Indian society depends on the rejection of these narrow loyalties by its members in favour of a direct and sole loyalty towards the society as a whole

(vi) Our moral philosopher would be further required to reconcile the contradictory attitudes of Hindu society towards women, one idealizing them as mothers and partners in life, the other denouncing them as frivolous and lustful (See chapter III, section V *supra*) It seems to us that the forces of change have been too strong for the Hindu society, rendering both the traditional attitudes irrelevant in modern times Our liberated women would not only scoff at the ancient depreciation of women, but also at the idea of being idealized and protected as mothers or masters of hearth and home

The image of woman as mother is a deep-rooted archetype in the Hindu psyche and represents the deepest sentiments and values of the original Hindu (Vedic) ethos Any new role of woman which seeks to question this image or role would be unacceptable to the Hindus As we have seen (vide chapter III, section VI *supra*), family is the pivot round which a man's entire life revolves in the Hindu society It is also the training ground for a comparatively high standard of inter-personal morality Women are traditionally given a central role in the family life If women's role in the family is disturbed due to the forces of modernization, it would result in the de-stabilization of the family structure and eventually of the society as a whole It means that the role of woman in the family has to be duly acknowledged in modern Hindu social thought All other atavistic

values or ideas concerning women, their nature and place in the society are to be rejected outright, and we are sure that this rejection would be acceptable to the Hindu masses Thus, the task of a modern philosopher would not be so much to reconcile the opposing views regarding women in ancient thought, most of which have to be rejected, as to seek to reconcile the traditional role of women with the role of the modern 'liberated' women in the society

(vii) The above process of comparing, contrasting and rejecting various ideas of Hindu religio-moral thought would lead our thinker to certain ideas and values which are basic to the entire Hindu Dharma More importantly, these ideas and values have immense intrinsic worth and must be incorporated into, or form the basis of, a reconstructed Hindu philosophy of morals It would, therefore, be the final task of our philosopher to select, develop and emphasize these basic principles The first such idea is the old Vedic vision regarding the ultimate Truth being one, even though it is called by many names [52] It recognizes the transcendence and infinity of the ultimate Reality and contends that no human account, insofar as it seeks to put determinate labels on the 'Infinite' and the 'Indeterminable', can exhaust the mystery of the 'Transcendent' At the same time, every religion possesses some glimpse of Him (It) and should be respected as such Hinduism thus teaches mankind universal tolerance, a tolerance which does not express the ego of being the chosen people of God, and which means respect for, and being receptive to, all other religious faiths Since of all world religions, it is Hinduism (along with other religions of Indian origin) which alone possesses this tradition of universal tolerance, it is Hinduism alone that can convincingly argue for it before mankind The Hindu faith that one Reality can be apprehended in many ways, implying the intrinsic worth of various religions, is not appreciated by Western critics Their lack of appreciation stems from their conviction that their own religion is the supreme and cannot thus be equated with other 'degenerate' religions The naivety of the entire approach is too obvious to need any rejoinder

Unfortunately, the modern Indian society is being torn apart by communal conflicts Hindu fanaticism, which sometimes

goes under the curious name of Hindu nationalism, is rather a recent development. Of course, it cannot be understood in isolation, that is, it is to be understood in the context of similar fanatical activities of other religious communities. But while the fanaticism of other religious communities may lessen the guilt of Hindu masses indulging in aggresively chauvinistic activities, it increases the responsibility of Hindu thinkers who can very well see the inconsistency in the Hindu approach. We cannot see how any fanaticism can breed in a 'religio-culture' for which tolerance or respect for all faiths is mandatory. It seems to us that a Hindu society which affirms the oneness of the ultimate Truth and then allows aggressive activities against other religious communities is a contradiction in terms. Hinduism cannot preserve its identity by merely projecting Vedic and other rituals and forsaking its basic vision. Only when the Hindu society is convinced of this vision can it convince other religious communities. It is now the responsibility of Hindu thinkers to present the Hindu vision of all religions being different ways of arriving at one ultimate Truth in a rational and convincing manner to the Indian people. Once it is consciously accepted by them, it would provide a rationale and a motive for the practice of universal tolerance and good will.

The Vedāntic vision of the Divine Absolute being the source and essence or Self of the entire creation and all living beings is the second most important Hindu idea that must be rationally presented and emphasized by a modern Hindu thinker. It is closely related to the Vedic vision of oneness of ultimate Truth. In the context of a Hindu philosophy of morals, there would be no need to go into the metaphysical details of the Vedantic monism, a simple affirmation of the 'Divine' indwelling all beings is all that is required. Such an assertion may sound dogmatic and mystical to a modern philosopher. It may also be contended here that ethics need not depend on dogmatic metaphysical assertions for its justification. But we think that some kind of ontological beliefs, whether asserted explicitly or accepted implicitly, are always presupposed by a philosophy of morals. (See chapter I, section I *supra*.) It should also be remembered that we are attempting here the Hindu philosophy of morals, and not a philosophy of morals. The Vedantic assertion of the

Divine immanence in all living beings, implying the essential unity or even identity of all selves, is the most basic assumption of such a philosophy And as pointed out by Paul Deussen (*vide* chapter VI, section IV *supra*), this assertion of all selves being essentially the same gives the most convincing justification for an inter-personal morality of the highest order In a beautiful passage of *Visnu Purāna* (*vide* chapter V, section III *supra*), it is stated that since the same Divine Being is the essence or Self of all living beings, He is the object of all our inter-personal dealings That is to say, if a man loves another, he loves the universal Self, and if he perpetrates violence against another, it is the Self who is the real object of that violence [53] If we compare it with the saying of Christ, that a man who helps and serves his fellow beings serves Christ, and he who rejects another man in need of help and succour rejects Him,[54] we would be able to appreciate that a vision of the metaphysical affinity of all living beings can alone provide a genuine basis for a morality of love and compassion for all living beings

The ideal of non-violence (*ahimsā*) is another fundamental principle of Hinduism (and all religions of Indian origin) It is closely related to the above vision Even the Buddhists, who do not believe in a substantial self, appeal to the principle of the essential affinity of all living beings for a rational justification of the ideal of universal non-violence and compassion As we know (*vide* chapter VI, section III *supra*), non-violence is not a negative virtue, rather it implies a positive attitude of compassion and concern for others, and a perception of all beings in the image of one's self Only recently, Mahatma Gandhi adopted non-violence, along with truth, as his central creed and guiding principle in his socio-political crusades He even succeeded in persuading the entire nation to adopt the principle of non-violence in its struggle for freedom

Violence erupted on an unprecedented mass scale in Mahatma's lifetime itself, and his violent death may be a symbol of the victory of violence over non-violence and all traditional values in modern India Violence is on the increase in the Indian sub-continent, as elsewhere in the world It seems to have become the creed of large sections of Indian society It is evident everywhere, whether in the form of communal riots, caste

conflicts, terrorist activities, or aggressive violent campaigns for chauvinistic demands on the part of some regional, linguist or other such group(s) If this increasing tendency to adopt violence as a means to achieve one's socio-political goals is not checked immediately, it would engulf and destroy the entire society The onus of presenting the ideal of non-violence in such a way that it becomes a strong intellectual force which can counter the creed of violence rests with the Hindu thinkers. The ideal of non-violence would be much more convincing, if it is presented in the right context of the perception of the metaphysical affinity of all human beings

Perhaps a few thinkers alone cannot either mitigate the frenzy of violence that has gripped the Indian society in recent times, or eradicate various other evils of the Hindu society The causes of these evils or a general rejection of moral norms by large sections of the Hindu society are very complex, and most of them have nothing to do with the influence of Hinduism At the same time, ideas have tremendous potential power If presented correctly, they can become powerful forces which can determine the course of events or transform the face of a society We believe that if certain basic ideas and values of Hindu Dharma are presented to the Hindu society in a rational and convincing manner, they would definitely sooner or later have a positive influence on the socio-moral values and conduct of the people It is now the responsibility of the Hindu thinkers to give right direction and guidance to the Indian people (including Hindus) The task, though difficult, is not an impossible one

NOTES

1 *M S* V 155-162
2 *Bṛhad Up* VI 2 13, VI 4 1-6
3 *M S* IX. 4, 88-90, *Gaut D S* XVIII 21-23
4 *M S* III 274, IX. 137-138
5 Ibid V 147-149, IX 2-3
6 The writer is indebted to P V Kane for the following discussion See *History* (1973), vol III, pp 856 ff
7 *Mbh Śan.P* CCLII 7-19
8 *M S* I 107-108, II 6-8
9 Ibid II 1

10 Ibid IV 155, 178
11 *Āpast D S* I 7 20 7-8
12 *Hārīta Samhitā*, quoted in History , vol III, p 856
13 Commentary on *Yajñ S* III 250, quoted in ibid, vol III, p 874
14 Commentary on *M S* II 10, quoted in ibid, vol III, p 874
15 Commentary on *M S* IV 176, quoted in ibid, vol III, p 874
16 *M S* II 18
17 *Āpast D S* I 1 1 1-2
18 *Kātyāyana Smṛti*, quoted in op cit , vol III, p 862, *M S* II 18
19 *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra* I 1 19-26, quoted in op cit , vol III, p 858
20 *Gaut D S* XI 20-22, cf *Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra* I 17, quoted in op cit , vol III, p 857
21 *M S* VII 203, *Yajñ S* I 343
22 *Yājñ.S* II 192
23 *Gaut D S* XI 20
24 *Baudhayana Dharma Sūtra* I 1 24-26, quoted in op cit , vol III, p 858
25 *M S* I 84-86
26 See *History*, vol III, pp 874, 885 ff
27 *Bṛhaspati Smṛti*, quoted in ibid, vol III, p 867, cf *Gaut D S* XI 23
28 *M S* II 8, XII 106
29 Ibid XII 108
30 *Mbh Śān P* CCLV 6, CCLVII 4 ff
31 *Matthew* 22 21
32 *Ś.B* , *Br S* , introd , I 1-4, *Ś B* , *Bṛhad Up* II 1 20
33 *Ś.B* , *Br S* I 3 34-38
34 *The Cultural Heritage of India* (1975), vol I, p 245
35 *M S* IX 8
36 Ibid IV 239 ff
37 Ibid II 274-275, IX 137-138
38 *Bṛhad Up* IV 3 35-36, *B G* II 13, 22
39 See *History* (1974), vol IV, p 335
40 *M S* II 145, III 55 ff , IX 95 ff
41 Ibid IX 13 ff
42 Ibid IX 59-63
43 Ibid IX 64-68
44 Ibid XI 191
45 Ibid XI 139
46 *Yajñ S* I 71-72, I 85
47 *B G* VI 29-32
48 *Mbh Śan P* , CCLI 19 ff , CCLIV 25 ff , CCCVIII 126, *Anuś P* CXVI 20-22, CXVII 18 ff
49 *Bhāg P* , bk III, ch 29, (1973, vol I, pp 264-265), bk VII, ch 7, (p 647), bk XI, ch 29, (vol II, pp 475-476)
50 *The Bijak* of *Kabīr* (1986), pp 55, 67, 69-70
51 *B G* II 47 ff , III 5 ff , IV 18 ff , V 3 ff , *M S* IV 138 ff , IV 171 ff
52 *Rg Veda* I 164
53 *Viṣṇu Purana*, bk III, ch 8, (1972, p 264)
54 *Matthew* 25 36 ff

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INDEX